

The

LIGHT LOVER

Full of
light-hearted
quinty



JOAN BUTLER

Author of "The Heaven Brand" etc.

THE LIGHT LOVER

JOAN BUTLER

Author of

"The Heavy Husband",

"Heat Haze",

"Inside Work",

"Ready Cash", etc.

Anthony Dennis Wayne is a young gentleman with ambition—to spend money fast and to marry it even faster ! At a house-party given by his best friend he meets a popular actress, a lady of leisure, and a mannequin who is posing as an heiress from Chicago. Tony's choice wavers between the three, and hesitation is dangerous for he only has a week to capture both the lady and her bank balance. Matters are complicated by the discovery that his friend is a snake in the grass. But our hero works faster than a striking rattler, though not as deadly. He does not loiter by the wayside and things work out according to plan—or almost !

THE LIGHT LOVER

JOAN BUTLER

has also written

LOVING CUP
UNNATURAL HAZARDS
MONKEY BUSINESS
BED AND BREAKFAST
MIXED PICKLE
HIGH PRESSURE
TROUBLE BREWING
TEAM WORK
HALF SHOT
SOMETHING RICH
RAPID FIRE
LOST PROPERTY
HALF HOLIDAY
ALL FOUND
HAPPY CHRISTMAS
CLOUDY WEATHER
SUN SPOTS
SHIRTY WORK
FRESH HEIR
LOW SPIRITS
DOUBLE FIGURES
THE OLD FIRM
FULL HOUSE
HEAT HAZE
SHEET LIGHTNING

THE LIGHT LOVER

by

JOAN BUTLER



STANLEY PAUL & CO. LTD

London New York Melbourne Sydney Cape Town

*ALL characters in the story are entirely fictitious
and have no reference to any living person.*

<i>First Published</i>	-	1929
<i>Reprinted</i>	- -	1934
<i>Reprinted</i>	- -	1935
<i>Reprinted</i>	- -	1936
<i>Reprinted</i>	- -	1937
<i>Reprinted</i>	- -	1948
<i>Reprinted</i>	- -	1950

*Printed in Great Britain by
Premier Press, Ltd.
Bushey Mill Lane
Watford, Herts.*

THE LIGHT LOVER

CHAPTER ONE

I

It was a morning in early June. The sun, which for the past three weeks had hidden shyly behind weeping clouds, appeared now like the white rabbit from the conjurer's hat, and beamed down on seven million and ninety-three suspicious Londoners, seven million of whom carried umbrellas as a reasonable precaution against being double-crossed.

In the outer regions, shopkeepers stood in their doors and, with sad smiles, watched life go by, now and then agreeing with some acquaintance that it was goin' to be a warm day if the rain kept off all right. Cats, drowsy after a night of amorous adventure, lay curled up in sunny corners, doubtless resolved to lead in future a better if a tamer life. Housewives, their reluctant progeny dispatched to school, appeared on the front steps with rag and tin, and polished the knocker. Another day well begun.

The pigeons in Trafalgar Square, with an eye to matrimonial ventures in the near future, preened them-

selves industriously. Striped awnings appeared, adding a spot of colour to the staid London grey, like a negro at a meeting of the Ku Klux Klan. Policemen smiled as they juggled with long strings of traffic. Errand-boys lounged whistling upon their way, now and then checking a moment in wonder at some daring exploit of that prince of detectives, Ashley Sharpe, the Human Bloodhound, or the super-bandit, Two-Gun Thaddeus.

It was, in short, one of those mornings when everything seems just right, and your dearest wish is to be fulfilled when you round the next corner. Young men smiled at young women, and were not rebuked. The milk of human kindness flowed like bootleg whisky in a Broadway night club. And all because the sun beamed down from a sky as blue as the eyes of the china dogs on the mantelpiece in a boarding-house parlour.

Time passed. The sun, with that habit it has in the morning, rose up and up. Shadows grew shorter, and the air warmer. A haze danced over the city, like the skirt of some nebulous but singularly agile hula-hula girl.

Just about the hour that visions of lunch take the place of memories of breakfast in men's minds Tony Wayne tilted his hat, ran a complacent eye down the crease of his trousers, submitted shoulders and back to the deft touches of his man, and took the air in the direction of Oxford Circus.

He liked Oxford Circus. He thought of it as a hive

of activity. People who worked for their living always interested him.

Anthony Dennis Wayne, at the age of twenty-seven, was what a Hyde Park orator of the Red persuasion would refer to as a social parasite. Tony preferred to consider himself a student of humanity. He knew what work was from seeing it being done; but he kept it at arm's length. He was not physically lazy—he had a Rugger blue, and Oxford men still spoke in hushed tones of the celerity with which he had once covered the half-mile, to the confusion of divers Cambridge undergraduates who previously had held the opinion that his legs were there more for ornament than use. But he did not work. He was one of Nature's drones.

And yet, his had been a strenuous existence. In London, New York, Paris and Monte Carlo, ambitious mammas with eligible daughters had dogged his footsteps, pounced on him from doorways, invited him to intimate parties, given him opportunities for being indiscreet, the mention of which made other young men lick their lips, crept up on him in crowded lobbies, and in these and similar ways made his life a misery and worn away his nerve.

But Mother Nature has her remedy for every ill. Tony's fresh young innocence had changed to hardened cynicism. His powers of observation and artifice had developed at the expense of his ideals. Woman, he learned, was a designing creature; and after a little

practice he side-stepped her advances so gracefully, and in so charming a manner, that she was never quite sure if he knew what he was doing.

Matrons with daughters in the marriage market could not deceive him. When they grew troublesome he paid his respects and ran away. If they followed him, reciting and exhibiting immodestly the charms of their little ones, Tony retired to the middle of Africa and shot several inoffensive lions and a buffalo or two. Bachelorhood looked good to him.

Yes. His was an eventful life. Great as may be the risks run by explorers and racing motorists and gentlemen of a like turn of mind, they are as nothing compared to the dangers faced by your presentable youth of good family and better income in this country, where, unless they can induce some man to commit bigamy, two million girls must face spinsterhood.

Tony knew it. He stepped warily, like a man unarmed in a jungle noted for the size, ferocity and number of its wild beasts. For him a raging lion had nothing on a desperate mamma bent on getting a daughter off her hands. You could shoot the lion.

He was a presentable youth, tall and pleasant, with a twinkle of humour in his grey eyes and the quirk of it in his lips. His income was reputed to rival that of an Indian prince. Mammams told their daughters to imagine what could be done with it. Tony was a careful dresser. His tailor was a man who loved his work. Tony's rooms were expensive, very expen-

sive. His car was a two-seater Rolls-Royce. He spent money as if he hated the stuff and knew no other way of getting rid of it. In short, he was what the vulgar might describe as a catch for any girl.

He came, this June morning, to Oxford Circus, and there halting, looked about him with an expression of benevolent interest. Men and women rushed past in every direction, quite obviously with some destination in mind. Buses and cars went by in continuous streams, as obviously headed somewhere, for some purpose. Tony wondered about all these hurrying people. The sun was warm, and the men looked hot under the collar. The women wore big hats that threw shade over their faces, and looked cool. But they were all in a hurry, all bound somewhere. Only the policeman directing the traffic seemed satisfied with his position. The policeman and Tony, who was wondering what he should do next.

That was decided for him. There are forces we wot not of that control our destinies and make a mock of us. One of these, in the form of a thin, spectacled youth, took Tony by the arm and led him at a rapid pace toward Antonetti's, a superior restaurant, the proprietor of which was born in humble circumstances in Petticoat Lane.

"Long time since I saw you, Tony," said the spectacled young man, turning abruptly in at the carefully concealed entrance to this establishment.

"And I, you, George," said Tony courteously.

"This is a matter that must be looked into. Friendship is to be prized above pearls, and the clasp of a true hand more than a cheque for a thousand of the best."

"Don't talk so much," said the spectacled youth, leading the way to a table for two. "When you begin to talk you make me forget everything I want to say."

"The family had some idea of putting me into politics," Tony said modestly, glancing with quiet approval down the menu. "But we decided against it. We Waynes have always been particular about our friends." He gave his order, then turned to his host.

George Trent had known Tony since their school days. More, he had admired and faintly envied Tony for the ease, bordering on genial contempt, with which that complacent youth greeted his world and prodded it smartly between the third and fourth button of the waistcoat. George was of a shy, retiring disposition. The limelight was not for him. He preferred to browse around in some secluded spot, listening to the birds and totting up long rows of figures.

At school Tony had pulled George out of scrapes. True, Tony it was, more often than not, who had got George into the scrapes. But George never thought of that. At Oxford Tony had continued this diverting practice. But after Oxford their lives had run on different lines, and they met seldom. Tony, in the social hive, was a drone; George was a worker.

George's father, early in life, had discovered that

a woman who hesitates to spend four shillings will cheerfully part with three-eleven-three, and hurry away in the belief that she has few equals in the financial world. By the application of this knowledge he had in a comparatively short time amassed a great amount of money. Whereupon he had opened a store in Oxford Street. Here, in a shorter time, he had amassed a still greater amount of money. He extended his premises, and at the same time his income. Branches were opened all over the country. Women began to mention Trent's in the same breath as Selfridge's and Barker's. The Income Tax authorities looked on Mr. Trent with a kindly eye. And at the age of fifty-five Mr. Trent had folded his hands across his waistcoat and retired to the country to chase butterflies. George had taken his place.

George liked work. He liked to see two pennies grow where one had been before. He made his bow to the business world with the firm determination of adding another million to the family fortune within the year. He failed in this laudable ambition; but the family fortune gained considerably in bulk. Usually shy and retiring, in his office George ceased to resemble the little violet, but took on a marked resemblance to some obnoxious growth. He became a Force. Strong men leaped to do his bidding. Beautiful women worked for him. Without changing colour he dictated letters to his stenographer.

And with the passing years, looking down from his pinnacle of feverish activity, George had felt his admiration for Tony, sauntering lazily through life, turn to contempt. The contempt of the worker for the drone. The contempt of the man who hoards for the man who spends. George considered Tony's mentality inferior to that of the common ant.

Tony knew nothing of this. He took life very much as it came, one thing after another, where his fellows were concerned. He had learned only to suspect women, to suspect that behind their smiles lurked the hard, calculating expression of a Jew bargaining with an Armenian. Facing George across the table, he guessed that the heir to the Trent millions sought his advice.

2

"You wear," Tony said, "a worried look. Some deal involving millions is on your mind. Is it that America's Selfridge has stolen the bread from your mouth by selling suspenders cheaper than you thought he could? Or has the admirable Mr. Barker cornered cammy-knicks? Has your supply of Suckitup Vacuum Cleaners run out? Does the public clamour for something you cannot supply? Have you . . . ?"

"Cork it!" said George. He looked at his soup with the dull and listless eye of a boiled fish.

Tony made ingratiating noises.

"Keep it corked," said George, ladling soup into

his mouth. "You know how it is with a fellow when he meets a pretty girl."

"Only too well," Tony sighed. Most of the pretty girls he knew, egged on by their mammas, had led him a dog's life. "Only too well. She sucks him dry and throws him into the nearest garbage-can."

"Especially," said George, "if he's never been in love before."

"Eh?" said Tony, sitting up. "Has some female buried her talons in the Trent millions?"

"No," said George. He brooded a moment. "But she hopes to."

Followed a pregnant silence while the waiter spirited away their plates and comforted them with savoury chops.

"When a fellow's in that state," said George gloomily, "he's not responsible for his actions. Like a loony. There should be some law to protect him."

"You amaze me," said Tony. "But proceed."

George attacked his chop with the savagery of a South Sea Island chef jointing a missionary. "Of course," he said between bites, "I wasn't really in love. I didn't know what love can be."

"From which," said Tony, "we deduce that you are really in love now?"

"Yes," said George.

"Ah!" said Tony.

"So you see how it is," said George.

"Are we," said Tony, "correct in believing that

you have made advances to one girl, and that now you find you love another?"

"Quite," said George.

"There seems no reason why your beauty sleep should be disturbed."

George flushed. A delicate shade of pink stole upwards from his throat to his ears, until he bore some slight resemblance to a lobster. Tony watched it in dismay.

"You don't mean to say you put it in writing?"

"I tell you a fellow isn't responsible for his actions at these times," George answered morosely.

"Good God!" said Tony. "A thoughtless young lover named Blink, put down his proposals in ink. Said the judge to him later, 'Pay up though you hate her, or spend three long years in clink.' "

"That's all very well," said George. "But it doesn't get us anywhere."

"It'll get you to wherever it is breach-of-promise cases are tried, young feller."

George shuddered.

"How much does she want?" said Tony.

"Oh, it hasn't come to that—yet." George looked slightly ashamed of himself. "I . . . I haven't told her . . ."

"Of your change of affections?" Tony said gracefully.

"Besides, she hasn't actually threatened anything."

"Maybe," said Tony, "she doesn't mean anything."

He pondered a moment. "How do you know she *does* mean anything?"

"Well," said George, "she always sent back the presents, but she kept the letters. I mean, you'd expect her to send back the letters and keep the presents, wouldn't you? If she felt she had to send back something."

"Quite," said Tony. "The point is well taken. George, my boy, like the waiter's thumb, you're in the soup. These epistles were outspoken, frank? The overflow of your throbbing heart, so to speak? The gushing current of your love?"

"I asked her to marry me," said George. "Several times."

"I weep for you," said Tony. "You haven't told me what station she occupies in life?"

"She's a mannequin."

"A mannequin!"

"A mannequin," George repeated defiantly. "In the store. A mannequin in the store."

Tony said nothing. The ways of young men in love, he thought, are inscrutable as the glance of the bald-faced owl.

"Can't you suggest anything?" said George.

"Marry her," said Tony.

"Anything helpful, I mean," said George.

"No," said Tony.

"You've had plenty of experiences in cases like this—that's why I confided in you."

Tony shook his head. "You wrong me. I have never proposed to a girl in my life."

"Think of something," said George.

"What's the use of thinking?" said Tony. "Unless you hire a thug to search her rooms for the letters. And no real gentleman does that. She has you by the short hairs, and you have only yourself to blame."

"It's all very well to talk like that," George said sulkily. "You've never been in love."

"Never," Tony admitted.

"You don't know what it is to be in love."

"No."

"I don't suppose you ever *will* be in love."

"No."

"And yet," said George, pressing home his point, "you have the confounded nerve to lecture me. When," said George, with rising heat, "I'm standing in the shadow of the gallows. When I'm as good as spliced."

Tony laughed a hollow laugh. "I'll bet you an even thousand," he said, "I'll be married before you."

"Eh?" said George, startled from the contemplation of his own troubles. "Come again?"

"Married," said Tony.

"But you're not in love!"

"Who," said Tony, "is talking about love? To marry, it's not necessary to be in love, is it?"

"Let me get this," said George. "You say you're

going to be married, and yet for four years you've done nothing but run away from women."

"I'm not going to run away in future. I'm going to let one overtake me."

"Which one?"

Tony shrugged. "Whichever has the most money."

"But you're rich!" George said shrilly.

"No," said Tony. "We were, but we are not. We had, but we have not. Life," said Tony, "is like that. One moment we are up, the next down." He illustrated with his hands. "We have been up. Now we are down. In other words, penniless."

George gasped.

"When I say penniless," said Tony, "I do not mean to be taken literally. Doubtless by going through our pockets we could scrape together a few hundred, and raise a thousand or so on the car. Possibly, if we tried, we could live for a year, in straitened circumstances, without resorting to desperate measures, such as getting married or looking for work. But the issue has to be faced. The grand sweeping gestures are beyond us. In four years we have spent some forty thousand pounds. We suffered from the delusion that, like the magic purse in the fairy-tales, our wad was inexhaustible. The only thing that remains is to surrender gracefully to some designing female and pass the rest of our days in loveless luxury, listening with sweet patience to her reproaches."

"But . . ." said George.

Tony raised one hand. "You are about to appeal to the chivalry of the Waynes. To say that this is not done. Consider. While the old exchequer was full, mothers with marriageable daughters invited me everywhere, taking little or no trouble to hide their base motives. The charms of their daughters, physical, mental and moral, were exhibited to me in the most immodest manner. Blondes, brunettes and albinos were paraded before me. Only tact and a strong will, combined with a certain fluidity, saved me from wedded bliss. In a darkened conservatory it's hard to keep from proposing to a girl, decently or indecently. Some are born for matrimony, others achieve matrimony, and others still have matrimony thrust upon them. I find it thrust upon me."

"Oh!" said George.

"So," Tony continued, pointing his moral, "your lot is not the worst. This mannequin will relinquish her claims for a consideration, and your young fancy will again be free to rove where it listeth. Are we to understand that it is already engaged? Yes? George, you are what our cousins across the Atlantic would call a fast worker. You get off the mark like a man struck from behind by a racing automobile. I foresee for you a brilliant career. The Trent millions will slip sparklers on the fingers of half the pretty girls in London."

"Can it," said George.

They walked out into the sunshine, and slowly

towards Oxford Street. George's gaze was on the ground, his brow corrugated with thought. Tony seemed immersed in pleasant reflection. They came in silence to Oxford Circus, and there halted.

"We must meet again," said Tony. "These little heart-to-heart chats strengthen friendship and understanding."

"Look here," said George, "why not come down to Hawkscliff next week? The mater is inviting quite a few people—sort of house-party affair, you know."

"A bun-struggle," Tony nodded. "As you say, why not? Perhaps there we will meet our bride-to-be."

"Eh?" said George.

"Our bride-to-be. Or, if you prefer it, the bride-elect."

"Oh, yes," George murmured. He seemed preoccupied.

"Of course," said Tony, "you understand that our financial difficulties . . ."

"Yes, yes!" George still seemed preoccupied. "You can rely on me. Drop down some time Saturday or Sunday, then. Cheerio!"

He hurried off in the direction of Trent's Mammoth Stores.

3

Tony, elegant and leisurely, the afternoon long before him, turned his footsteps towards Gracechurch Street, where he had his rooms. As he went, he

wondered why George had so closely resembled a bull-frog at the moment of their parting. He had, Tony thought, seemed surprised about something. George was a queer fish. A sober personage, taking life soberly. Little things worried him. Tony thought that the wrong spirit.

But what could have surprised George? Had he seen a creditor bearing down on him? Tony decided that wasn't probable; George was the sort of fellow who paid promptly in the hope of a slight rebate.

Still pondering in this vein, Tony came to White Street. In all London, no thoroughfare is so inaptly named. It is a short cut from Gracechurch Street to Holborn, a quiet, narrow street of second-class lodging-houses, into which the sun seldom shines.

But to-day there were warm splashes on the pavement, and a little of the golden mist of June, like a fairy's mantle, half-seen, half-guessed, had stolen in from wider thoroughfares to brighten for a while this cold grey cave of houses. Children played about in it, their laughter shriller and more frequent than usual —pale little elves, grimy-faced children of a city's shadow. Tony wondered if they had ever seen green fields and woods, felt a cool, fresh wind, heard the song of birds or the thunder of waves on a rocky coast. Here, their horizons were houses and the sky, their winds smoke-laden, their day's harmony the roar of traffic. They reminded him, with their bright eyes and merry din, of so many sparrows crowded around

oats fallen from a carrier's bag. They were as numerous, and the world counted them as lightly.

Then Tony saw the girl. She was such a girl as he had always wished to see—slender, not so tall, dressed inconspicuously and with sure taste. Her little hat was tilted a trifle down over one eye with a most becoming and piquant effect, at what Tony described to himself as a damn-me angle. Under it, her face was a thing of blue eyes and laughter, even when, as now, she was grave.

In one hand she held a book, and in the other the end of a leash. At the remote end of the leash waddled a white bulldog of gargantuan proportions and an expression of the extremest malignity.

She was about twenty yards from Tony when it happened. Cuthbert the Cat, beguiled by the warmth of the afternoon and the preoccupations of his natural enemies, the children, had some time previous to this strolled forth from the alley he made peculiarly his own, and, with a brief glance around to fix securely in his mind the five different lines of retreat from a possible enemy, had curled himself up in a patch of sunshine beside a garbage-can. An hour's unbroken peace having blunted his suspicion that this was too good to last, he had closed his watchful eyes and trusted to whatever gods there are in the cat's Valhalla. They let him down.

"Bill!" said the girl suddenly. "*Bill!*"

Had Tony's name been Bill, he would have leaped

to her side like a playful gazelle. As it was, he contented himself with observing her even more closely than before, trying earnestly to record upon his amiable features some expression of his willingness to help.

This was lost on her. She deigned him not a glance. With a series of elephantine bounds the bulldog jerked himself free from her restraint, and, so far as Tony could judge, advanced like an unusually nimble brontosaurus, with murderous intent, upon an innocent garbage-can. Tony decided there was more in this than met the casual eye.

Cuthbert the Cat awoke to find Doom bearing down on him as fast as four bowed legs could carry it. He arched his back and swore, making himself, by that secret magic known to cats, seem three times as large as in reality he was. In vain.

If possible, Doom accelerated a little, emitting a low but thunderous threat. Bill the Bulldog was not to be bluffed. He was in no doubt as to what he proposed to do. All his life he had hated cats, and here, delivered into his jaws on this day of all days, was a cat. Bill meant to spread that cat about the vicinity as a small boy spreads jam on his bread. The inhabitants of the district might object; but that was none of Bill's concern. The cat might object; but that would only add a little liveliness to the proceedings. Bill's mistress might object; but Bill felt that, having worked a few moments on the cat, he could face with fortitude any unpleasantness that might ensue. All he

asked was to be left alone with Cuthbert for one crowded hour of glorious life. Or even two minutes.

Cuthbert desired nothing less than he desired this, but in the moment of danger his coolness left him. Deciding hurriedly that his bluff had failed, he bounded across the path and made an earnest but futile endeavour to scale the wall of the nearest house. Failing in this, he dropped back to the pavement, by some miraculous contortion evading the widely opened jaws of the expectant Bill, capering below like a bear at the Zoo in anticipation of a monkey-nut. He touched the pavement long enough to change the direction of his flight—no longer. Bill doubled back upon himself with an agility surprising in an animal whose lines ran so much more to strength than grace, and bounded in pursuit. And Cuthbert, squalling hysterically, leaped for the exact centre of Tony's waistcoat.

It is in moments like this that a man shows the stuff of which he is made. He has no time to think, to weigh advantages and disadvantages; his action is instinctive. Tony, his chivalry thus commanded, simultaneously tucked Cuthbert under one arm and kicked Bill smartly in the short ribs. Bill, with a grunt of pained surprise, withdrew a little to think things over, hurt more in his feelings than anywhere else. He was a friendly dog, unused to kicks in the short ribs. To him a kick in the short ribs was an event not lightly to be dismissed. He regarded Tony with a suspicious eye. But Tony's interest in him had faded.

"How *dare* you!" said the girl. Her eyes had in them the sparkle of sunshine on ice, and a little spot of colour was in each cheek. She looked more charming than ever. Either this girl knew her cosmetics, or Nature had endowed her with a complexion that needed none.

"Well, you see . . ." said Tony, raising his hat, while Cuthbert swore.

"There was no necessity to kick Bill," she interrupted coldly.

"I am very sorry," said Tony.

"Here, Bill!" She held out a little gloved hand.

Bill, humbly agitating his stub of a tail, approached. Tony gathered up the leash, handed it to her; but her slight nod of thanks was the nearest concession to politeness. Cuthbert, baleful green eyes on Bill, delivered himself of a sibilant stream of blasphemy, to which Bill returned an inscrutable stare. Bill seemed to picture to himself some quiet place, unmarred by interfering humans, where he and Cuthbert could meet and settle their differences. Preferably a large, open space, with nothing projecting more than a foot above the general level. A good, wide strand would do excellently, or a four-acre field.

"Hey, mister!" said a shrill voice. "That's our cat."

"Indeed?" said Tony. "You are to be congratulated." He beamed down on the tattered urchin, and delivered the still swearing Cuthbert to his care.

"Guard him well; he is a valuable cat. Some day, perhaps, he will win prizes. Remember Dick Whittington."

"Come along, Bill," said the girl.

"Pardon me," said Tony, "but you wouldn't . . ."

"I think not."

"No," said Tony. "No."

"You were going to say?" said the girl, looking back, a dimple peeping at him from one cheek.

"Merely to offer to lead Bill," said Tony. "But . . ."

"Exactly. Thanks all the same." Her eyes were friendly now. "Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon," said Tony.

He watched her as she went down the street. Would she look back? That seemed a matter of the utmost importance. Tony almost ceased to breathe as she reached the end of the street. Would she? Now, if ever. . . .

She did not. She was gone. The multitudes in Holborn had swallowed her.

Tony sighed. The warmth had gone from the sunshine, and the sky was grey. Lazy, golden June had changed to bleak December. He was tempted to turn up the collar of his coat. Life was like that.

The girl went on her way, along Holborn, along Oxford Street, until she reached Trent's Mammoth Stores. Here she turned aside into a narrow alley, coming thus to an open door, inside which a fat man sat reading.

"Hello, Pat."

"Ye've brought the great beast ag'in, miss," Pat said, considering Bill with a genial eye. Bill writhed like a worm smartly trodden on at one end.

"You'll take care of him for me, won't you, Pat?"

Pat said he would, and, leaving Bill with him the girl went on into the shop. Not into the shop that customers knew. This was a place of cloakrooms and wash-houses, with innumerable hooks supporting coats and hats, and here and there an elderly woman reading.

The girl slipped off her coat, gently removed the little hat from her bobbed brown hair, and hung them up. After that she washed her hands, and touched her hair deftly before the nearest mirror. Her eyes laughed back at her from it, though her mouth was wistful. Sometimes she felt it wasn't fair for a girl with eyes like hers to have a wistful mouth, because the one belied the other.

Denise Brooks, at twenty-two, had looked the world in the eye for four years, and wrested a living from it, though sometimes a precarious living. She kept the wolf from the door; but generally he was snuffling just around the corner, watching for a chance to do his stuff. Denise didn't much mind, though now and then she wondered if it was going to be like that always. Then it was that she wished her eyes could be more in harmony with her mouth; for she felt that to be depressed and at the same time look in the best

of spirits somehow wasn't right. It seemed almost a form of hypocrisy.

Denise's parents had died when she was very young, leaving her just enough money to provide an education. Her childhood, while not actually unhappy, had been far different from the joyous affair her nature must have made it under other circumstances. The aunt with whom she had spent her earlier years, and, later on, her vacations, had been a kind, just woman; but she did not understand children. And as Denise had grown, her aunt's understanding of her had shrunk to a negligible quantity. At eighteen Denise had left school, and they had parted without regret, though only at the girl's insistence.

She had come to London, the Mecca of her childish dreams. And she had loved London, and loved it still, cavalier as had been its treatment of her. She loved its fogs, the patter of rain in its streets, its mellow sunshine, its traffic, and its crowds. She loved its old buildings, and she loved the Underground; she loved the river, the bridges, the Pool, and the Embankment with its lights. She loved, too, its theatres, though she saw them most often from the "gods".

Unqualified for any office work, she had taken what offered, glad enough so long as it preserved her from her aunt's cold charity. At the lowest ebb of her fortunes she had been a waitress. Now she was a mannequin, and the future seemed no brighter than it had been then.

With her laughing eyes and her wistful mouth, she passed from the long cloak-room into the shop proper. Her mouth, just then, was the truer indication of her spirits. Not for almost a year had she had a holiday, and this June afternoon made her think of cool, green waves on a golden beach, and the plaint of gulls, and a fresh, salty breeze. . . .

She was preoccupied all afternoon, her thoughts curiously jumbled. There was that affair after lunch when she had gone to her room to fetch Bill, meaning to bring him for a good long walk when the shop shut. Poor old Bill! He had a pretty rotten time of it, Denise thought. Yet he never complained, and was pathetically grateful when she brought him out. Then he must be kicked in the ribs by . . .

By what? A ruffianly blackguard? Denise smiled fleetingly at nobody in particular. No, that description didn't quite fit. A hulking coward, then? She'd seen those somewhere lately, in an S.P.C.A. report, she thought. No, he wasn't a hulking coward, either. In fact . . . Well, he *had* rather nice eyes. And that pleasant, lazy smile. . . . There was something very likeable in that. But he shouldn't have kicked poor old Bill. Though to be sure he hadn't kicked him very hard.

"Miss Brooks!"

"Yes?" Denise said, coming out of her trance with the suddenness of the somnambulist who has turned on the cold shower.

"Mr. Trent wishes to see you in his office."

Denise sighed. She supposed it was another proposal, though, now that she came to think of it, there hadn't been so many of late. Nor had George been slinking around so much. At first he had been rather like a leopard cautiously circling a trap, afraid to approach, but watering at the mouth for the goat that baited it. Then, finding courage, he had complimented her on her work, and a few months later invited her out to lunch.

This invitation Denise politely but firmly declined. She said it might give the other girls ideas. What she really meant was that it might give George ideas.

That had been two months ago, and since then George had proposed on an average once a week. George was a nice boy; but Denise couldn't quite picture herself tied to him for life. On several occasions lately she had bounded a foot or more in bed, gasping with the sudden fear that after another few months he would wear down her resistance and force her to accept him. But her resistance wasn't quite worn down yet. It was still pretty healthy.

"You wished to see me, Mr. Trent?"

"Please take a seat, Miss Brooks," George said, pushing forward a chair. He waved his secretary from the room. "There's a little matter I'd like to talk over with you. . . ." He paused, working at his collar, and Denise observed him with a sympathetic eye. It must be rather uncomfortable to be in love, she thought.

"Yes?" she said kindly.

"Er . . ." George said. "I was . . . that is . . . you see . . ."

"Do go on," Denise pleaded. "The Story of My Life, Chapter One, by one of our Merchant Princes. 'I was born in the little village of Mudville, Salop, in humble circumstances, my mother being an itinerant basket-weaver and my father a pickpocket. Early in life the principles of thrift were instilled into my mind by some words of my father, who had a habit of remaining quietly at home for long periods, on the occasion of his taking from me a penny I had found. "Money, my son," he said, "is the scarcest thing in the world. If ever you see any, grab it. If ever you grab any, hold on to it." From that moment I determined'—but am I interrupting you, Mr. Trent? You were saying something, I think."

"I was wondering," said George, "if you'd care to spend next week with me in the country?"

Denise sat up like a victim in the electric chair when the current is switched on. Was this monster the same lovesick boy who so short a time ago had likened her eyes to stars and her lips to cherries? Could it be that she had misjudged him?

"What?"

"Oh, please, please!" George said, scarlet-faced. "You misunderstand me, indeed you do!"

"I hope so," said Denise, relaxing. "Make yourself clear, Lothario."

George did as best he could. "The mater," he said, "is inviting a few people down next week. There'll be tennis and swimming and picnics, and all that sort of tommy-rot, you know. She told me to bring anyone I liked, so, of course, I thought of you at once."

"That was very nice of you."

"Then you'll come?" said George eagerly.

"No, thanks all the same."

"You would, if you only knew," George sighed, looking despondent.

"If only I knew what?"

"The hours of agony you'd save me."

"Why should I save you hours of agony?" Denise asked reasonably. "Your agony is nothing to me."

"If you knew the ghastly people the mater will have down. . . ."

"If I did, my refusal would probably be more emphatic than it is."

"They'll drive me mad," George groaned.

"Besides," said Denise, "your mother wouldn't like it. She'd think it peculiar if you invited a girl from the shop."

"I thought of that," said George, a slight gleam in his eye. "There'd be no necessity for anybody to know you were a girl from the shop."

"I don't see how anybody could be prevented from knowing."

"If you were willing," George said, "to come down as a girl from America. . . ."

"I'm not willing to come down at all," Denise said. "Not even as a girl from Timbuktu."

"But why?" George pleaded. "Why? Wouldn't you like it? You must be fed up with this place. Wouldn't you like to swim, and lie in a hammock, and play tennis, and sail a boat . . . ?"

"Stop!" Denise moaned. "Please stop! When I want a bath, I have to take it in instalments. I'd give anything for a swim."

"Wouldn't you," said George fiendishly, "like to lie in bed as long as you pleased every morning, and have your breakfast brought to you if you felt lazy? Wouldn't you——?"

"Yes," Denise said, "I would. But I'm not going to."

"Wouldn't you like to give Bill a few runs in a real green field, with rabbits to chase?"

"Poor Bill!" Denise sighed.

"That touches you," said George. "You'll come for his sake, if not for mine or your own, and I'll give you my solemn promise not to annoy you."

"I'm not going," said Denise definitely. "Besides, I've no clothes."

"Clothes? Clothes? Take anything you want from the shop."

"Anything?"

"Absolutely anything!"

"You tempt me," said Denise wistfully.

"You'll come?" said George. "Please!"

Still she hesitated.

"Remember Bill," said George.

Poor old Bill! All life had given him was a kick in the ribs. . . .

"You'll be Miss Brooks from Chicago, a wealthy heiress," said George. "Miss Denise Brooks of Chicago. We met in a night-club. You're touring Europe for pleasure."

"Will I?" said Denise. "Did we? Am I? Well, for Bill's sake . . ." She gave him one slim hand. "It's very kind of you, Mr. Trent."

"Make it George, won't you?"

"If you keep your promise of not annoying me," said Denise.

"Send in a list of all the things you want," said George. "Run about the place with your eyes open, and anything you think you'd like, say the word, and I'll have them packed for you. Anything from . . ."

Denise nodded.

"To fur coats. Whatever you feel you want."

"I hope I'll not want a fur coat," said Denise.

"You never know; the weather may change. Don't forget a collar for Bill."

"I hope," said Denise, "you don't regret this. Of course, I'll give back all the clothes."

"Only if you feel you must," said George. "But you'll remember, won't you? You're an heiress from Chicago, and we met in a night-club."

Denise nodded. "I don't see the necessity for all this, though," she said.

"Well," said George, "I'll have to explain nobody's knowing you some way."

"Of course. I didn't think of that. Is that all, then?"

"That," said George, "is all. I'll bring you down in the car, of course."

"Unless I change my mind," said Denise. She paused in the doorway to look back at him. "Something tells me you're going to rue this, George."

"Pooh!" said George. "Pooh, pooh! Send in that list as soon as you like."

He shut the door behind her, and, crossing to the window, stood looking up at the deep blue sky, a little pucker of concentration between his brows. The roar of traffic swelled from below, rose upward in triumphal song of movement, dinned in his ears; but he heeded it not. A fly strutted undisturbed upon his nose.

Seeing him, you must have believed him buried deep in concentration of some vast deal, some masterly manipulation of the strings of Big Business. You must have guessed, and, guessing, shuddered, at the ruin that awaited his rivals. George, it seemed, was about to sell some financial magnate a pup.

But no. As ever, appearances deceived. George Trent was merely thinking out the further details of his foul scheme, which was to throw together Mr.

Anthony Wayne, penniless gentleman of leisure, and Miss Denise Brooks, penniless Chicagoan heiress, and see what happened.

4

On this fair afternoon, while all Nature smiled, a girl came strolling through Admiralty Arch into St. James's Park. She was a slim girl, carrying a sunshade; and beneath her large, floppy hat was a face so peerless and delicately sweet as to make men turn to look after her, and to bring an expression of admiration warring with envy into the eyes of the women she passed.

Indeed, Joan Harrington might well be described as an eyeful, and was, at twenty-one, about the most popular musical comedy star in London. Her rise to fame, as the newspapers frequently recalled to public notice, had been nothing short of meteoric. Winner of a beauty contest at the age of eighteen, she had been found to possess such talent that managers had clamoured for her signature at the bottom of contracts which had seemed no more real than dreams. Her present contract ended with the expiration, the previous night, of the play in which she had starred, and now a holiday seemed indicated.

Charmingly preoccupied, her deep grey eyes a little sad, she sat on a seat beside the lake and watched the busy ducks. At the other end of the seat was a young man in grey flannels; but that was a fact which for

the moment escaped her notice. She centred her interest on the ducks, and envied them. All they had to worry about was their food, and even that was brought to them. They didn't care if it rained, or if the glass registered ninety degrees in the shade. When frost came, the ice was broken for them. They were pampered.

Not that Joan wished she was a duck. A few young men, overcome with emotion, had called her a duck, seemingly with some idea of being complimentary; but she was more or less satisfied with herself as she was. What worried her was this: Where was she going? Did the life she lived at present lead anywhere? So far as she could see, its greatest and ultimate triumph was to be applauded by row upon row of bald-headed old roués with opera-glasses. That meant a heavy balance at the bank; but she desired something more.

She wasn't at all sure what she desired, nor that she would make any great effort to attain it. She was conscious only of a vague restlessness, a dissatisfaction with life. That was why she envied the ducks swimming about there, tilting themselves upside-down with the utmost nonchalance. They were content to live for the day. A worm now meant more than an eel to-morrow. Well, perhaps that was as good a way as any. Certainly worrying didn't do much good.

A little breeze ruffled the water, tilted her sunshade and the brim of her big hat. It lifted a paper from the knees of the young man in grey flannels who occu-

pied the other end of the seat, and, after a tentative swoop or two, dropped it at Joan's feet. She stooped, gathered it up, and glanced expectantly at its owner. He had not stirred. A soft Panama was pulled down over his eyes, and from beneath it issued the gentlest of snores, hardly remarkable even during a Sunday morning sermon. He was asleep.

Joan looked at him, a little smile on her lips. He impressed her as being an unusual young man. Different, somehow. His face and hands were tanned a deep brown, as if by a tropical sun. He was well-built, but rather spare, and there was little flesh on his face. An energetic young man, Joan thought. Dynamic. Or perhaps he suffered from some wasting disease. How old? She found some difficulty in deciding. Over thirty? Well . . . no. In or about thirty. Maybe twenty-eight. She liked his clothes; they had been cut by a tailor who knew that a jacket has a soul. But he really shouldn't fall asleep in public parks.

She wondered, idly, why he had fallen asleep. Probably he'd danced into the small hours of the morning. Or perhaps he'd been burning the midnight oil, to take a more charitable view of his relapse. Joan would have liked to wake him up and tell him to go home to bed, but suspected he might resent that. Experience had taught her that young men have a vast store of dignity which renders them resentful of good advice. Tell a young man to go to the devil, she thought, and

he's with you all the way; but tell him to mend his mode of life and he hints you're an interfering busy-body. Joan, having listened to the proposals of numerous young men, and suffered the attentions leading up to them, knew something of the species.

Her latest admirer was that Trent boy. George, she thought his name was. He impressed her as being very young and rather mawkishly sentimental. She wondered if this was his first love-affair. Did she like him? She decided that she did. Unlike so many of his rivals, he still had the sex on a pedestal. Joan liked him for that, though she was afraid it wouldn't last long. Men who put women on a pedestal usually ended up in the Divorce Court with their love-letters read out before an appreciative and guffawing public.

Joan yawned, and George Trent slipped from her mind. Her last conscious thought of him was that very probably he'd propose several times during the house-party next week. She suspected that had been his idea in asking her down, to corner her in some idyllic bower in the rose-garden and lay his heart at her feet. The last time she had seen him he'd had a purposeful gleam in his eye, mute declaration that the moment for trifling was past. Just why had she accepted his invitation to Hawkscliff? Maybe because the name appealed to her, more than for any other reason. Well . . .

She yawned again, and looked down at the paper. Her glance wandered casually over the head-lines.

Nothing of interest. . . . Still another co-respondent produced in that divorce case. . . . Another Channel swim failure. . . .

She sat up with a jerk, her eyes wide. So apparent was her consternation that an old lady just then passing halted, eyed her benignantly, and leaned forward.

"No bad noos, I 'ope, dearie?"

"I beg your pardon," said Joan, looking up.

"No bad noos, I 'ope?"

"Bad news? No, indeed. Oh, no! Not at all, thanks."

"I seen you start so suddent," the old lady continued affably, clasping gnarled hands on her stick, "I ses to myself, I ses, that there pore little gal's found bad noos, sure as me name is Angela Price. That's what I ses, dearie. Likely someone you was fond of 'as died suddent?"

"No, really," Joan said, smiling. She was at her best with old people. "Thanks awfully, but it's quite all right."

"It's a relative dead, then?" said the old lady with conviction. "I've 'ad 'em go meself, dearie, one after t'other, so I know 'ow you feel. 'Ave a good cry, now, an' you'll be better."

"No," said Joan, "not even a relative."

"Not a relative," said the old lady, plainly mystified. "Your boy ain't jilted you, 'as 'e?"

"Not yet," said Joan. "It's just that I found something of interest. No bad news at all."

"Well," said the old lady, mildly resentful, "you *did* look to me like a gal who's 'ad bad noos. Minute I seen you, I ses to meself, that pore little gal's 'ad bad noos, for sure. But if you says no, why then I suppose you know best." She leaned forward confidentially. "You ain't got the price of a pint on you, now dearie?"

Joan obliged, and with a last crinkled smile and a bob of her black bonnet the old lady hobbled on. Joan returned to the paragraph that interested her so much. It ran :

MISSIONARY FROM AFRICA SHOCKED
BY OUR THEATRES

JOAN HARRINGTON CRITICIZED

The Rev. David Selwyn, recently returned to England after seven years' missionary work in South and Central Africa, has been shocked by our theatres, several of which he visited during the week. In a scholarly, but somewhat hasty, letter, which runs to nine closely-written sheets of foolscap, the Rev. David states emphatically that neither the Bantus nor the Hottentots have anything on us so far as indecent public performances are concerned.

We are, the reverend gentleman goes on to say, not only indecent, but inartistic; and here we fall far below the standard set by the Bomongos, a tribe to which Mr. Selwyn seems passionately attached. The forty dainty young ladies of the chorus of *Who Says So?* seem especially to have roused his ire, as has the leading lady, our own lovely Joan Harrington, of whom the Rev. David had several

unfriendly, and to our mind untruthful, remarks to pass. There is no more modest girl on the stage to-day than Joan, and we feel that, were we to publish his letter, which we have returned to him, hers would be the most justifiable of the numerous suits for libel the reverend gentleman would find on his hands.

What we find hard to understand is this : If the condition of our stage appals him so, why does Mr. Selwyn persist in visiting show after show? Cynics might perhaps suggest that it is because he likes to watch the nimble prancings of the naughty ladies; but we hesitate to accept this as the true explanation. To conclude, might we hint that should he ever meet her, the Rev. David Selwyn owes Miss Harrington a very humble apology.

"Well . . ." Joan said. She read the item again, with feelings too complicated for any but a detailed description. Uppermost, perhaps, was fury—blind, homicidal fury. Could she have laid hands on him then, it is probable that the Rev. David Selwyn would have lost most of his hair before the police could interfere. Joan was in that state which demands action, and forcible action, rather than words. She felt as if she had, for no reason at all, been slapped in the face by an utter stranger. But this hurt more. Her fighting spirit was roused. Her dander was up. She was so mad she could spit.

Hard on the heels of her fury came resentment. She knew the attack to be undeserved and unjust, for where the dresses she wore were concerned her word

was law. Though no prude, she knew she wasn't immodest. Her conscience was clear.

Next came wonder. Why had the Rev. David Selwyn said the obviously horrible things he *had* said about her? Had he been a jilted suitor of the more obnoxious type she could have understood it; but the man had been in Africa for the last seven years, so that was out of the question.

And beneath these three, on the point of suffocation, but struggling bravely, was an appreciation of the humour of the whole thing. What a narrow-minded, prudish, mid-Victorian ass the Rev. David Selwyn must be! Joan tried to visualize him, and thought of a long face, side-whiskers, and a horrible, sing-song voice. He wouldn't be over-particular about his linen, either. A thoroughly foul old man.

"The . . . the . . ." Joan whispered. She felt her fingers about the Rev. David's scraggy neck, and twisted ruthlessly. The paper tore across.

Abruptly, Joan came back to earth. She looked at the paper. It had seen its day. Perhaps in time to come to might harbour fish and chips, or fragments of it line a sparrow's nest; but as a newspaper its utility was negligible.

"Golly!" Joan whispered. Her first impulse was to rise and steal away, with never a backward glance. Her next was to buy a paper to replace the one she had torn. Yes, that was best. She could slip away and be back again before the young man in grey awoke.

Joan then looked at the young man in grey. He was watching her with the expression of the bookie who sees the heavily-backed outsider romp home. A shocked, startled, incredulous expression. Quite obviously the young man in grey could not believe his eyes. At least, so it seemed to Joan.

"I'm so sorry!" she said.

The young man in grey came out of his trance.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I'm sorry I tore your paper," said Joan.

"Are you? I mean, did you?"

Joan began to feel out of her depth. If it wasn't because she had torn his paper, why had he been staring at her like that?

"You see," she said, "the wind blew your paper down, and I picked it up; but you were asleep, so I looked at it, and . . ."

"Yes?" said the young man, interestedly. "Yes, yes? You looked at it, and . . ."

"Tore it," said Joan.

"But why? Why tear it?" He seemed to hint that girls who went around tearing people's newspapers were a public danger.

"The . . . the old reptile!" said Joan. "The foul old man! The . . ."

"I beg your pardon?" said the young man in grey, staring. "May I ask . . .?"

"Who the old reptile is?" said Joan. "You may." She referred to the paper. "The Rev. David Selwyn."

"Oh! Ah! Oh!"

"Read that," said Joan.

The young man in grey read it.

"Ah!" he observed noncommittally. Like a wise man, he waited to learn how this concerned Joan.

"Well," she said, "I'm Joan Harrington."

She looked at the young man in grey. The young man in grey looked at her. Joan decided he might be handsome if it wasn't for his habit of staring.

"So you see why I was angry," she said. "If ever I meet this Rev. David Selwyn . . ." She laughed, and stood up. "I'm sorry about your paper. Good afternoon."

With a genial nod she strolled off. The young man in grey watched her a moment, then took out a handkerchief and passed it across his brow with the air of one who has been missed by inches by a four-ton truck.

"Phew!" he murmured. "What a shave!"

He watched that slender figure a moment longer, then, bounding to his feet, made off rapidly in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER TWO

I

"PARKER," Tony said, "have you ever thought of marriage?"

"So much so, sir," Parker said, "that I have never seriously contemplated it."

"Yet," said Tony, "on occasion you have, in your own quaint way, expressed surprise at my evasion of the holy bonds."

"For a gentleman in your position, sir . . ."

"Financial position, you mean?"

"Precisely, sir."

"Don't you think that would make 'em run after me?"

"Not the desirable ones, sir. With them, money does not count."

"You've got to show me," said Tony. "There's no woman living with whom money doesn't count."

"If, sir," Parker continued, "I have never been married, I have at least known many who were, and a certain interest in their courtship and wedded life has, I think, qualified me to speak on the subject."

"You have our ear," said Tony.

It was Sunday afternoon, an afternoon of blue sky and misty horizon that promised good weather. The

Rolls drifted along a dust-white road, between flower-starred hedges, and green fields where sheep and cattle grazed and horses stood drowsy in the shade of trees. Now and then a farmhouse was passed, or a sleepy village, with children playing in the road and the male population draped artistically against the wall of the pub. A scene of rural peace, needing only a few bonneted milkmaids and a smocked cowherd or two to look like something Landseer might have painted. But the milkmaids were out somewhere in high-heeled shoes and imitation silk stockings and other things, and the cowherds were out looking for the milkmaids in suits ordered by post on the self-measurement scheme.

"Woman," said Parker after a moment's thought, "is an enigma."

"You've said something, brother," said Tony. "But I've an idea it has been said before."

"One reads of the Sphinx, sir," Parker continued, "and you and I have seen it; but I firmly believe that an average woman beside the Sphinx can only be compared to one of Bernouilli's most abstruse problems beside a child's puzzle."

"I don't quite get the reference, old-timer."

"Bernouilli, sir," was a mathematician of Newton's time."

"You're trying to say that the average woman is a more baffling mystery than the Sphinx?"

"Precisely, sir. She is, so to speak, an unlabelled

bottle. One sips, and finds ambrosia; another sips, and finds strychnine."

"Like all other mysteries," Tony said, "the mystery of woman is no longer attractive once you've solved it."

"That may be, sir," Parker admitted; "but every woman is in herself a mystery separate and distinct from her sisters, and in every case the solution is entirely different. If not, where is the reason for all these divorces?"

"For a man who has never been married, you seem to know a whale of a lot about women."

"I think I may claim to have given some time to the study of the sex, sir."

"Ah!" said Tony with interest. "And what conclusions have you reached?"

"That it was a waste of time, sir. Or, more correctly, that any conclusions reached in regard to any one woman cannot be applied to the sex as a whole, and vice versa."

"You were," said Tony, skilfully frustrating the designs of a hen bent on suicide, "to prove to me that I should have married long ago. So far you have materially added to my conviction that Solomon vies with Brigham Young as the world's leading dumb-bell."

"I have always considered that you and Lady Claire would have been very happy together, sir. Lady Claire, sir, if I may say so, was a real lady. She would marry

the man she loved, whether he had five hundred a year or five thousand. Then there was Miss Parkhurst, sir; money meant nothing to her."

"Because she had more than she could possibly want," said Tony. "But have you any idea where she is at present, Parker?"

"In Scotland, with her parents, sir, I believe. And there was Miss Jordan, and Miss Sydenham, and Miss Meredith, not to mention all the young ladies you met in New York whose fathers were in the bootlegging business."

"So you think I should have married?"

"Not exactly, sir."

"Now, now, Parker!" Tony said. "The Wayne morals are above reproach. These pseudo marriages are not for us."

"You misapprehend me, sir. What I meant was that, while not definitely saying you should have married, I do believe you would have a better chance of making a happy match than most young gentlemen. If I may say so, sir, you have met the cream of the young ladies of both England and America."

"No," said Tony. "There you're wrong."

"Yes, sir?"

"Yes. Decidedly, yes. I don't mean maybe, Parker. I saw the cream of the young ladies of England and America walking down White Street no later than last Wednesday. Let me tell you about her. She had blue eyes——"

"May I take the liberty of reminding you, sir, that so had Lady Claire?"

"Lady Claire be jiggered!"

"Certainly, sir."

"No other girl," said Tony, "ever had eyes so blue as this girl's eyes. They are so blue, Parker, that they are purple."

"Extraordinary, sir!"

"There's nothing extraordinary about it. Her hair, Parker, reminded me irresistibly of leaves in the autumn, russet touched with gold."

"Very poetic, sir."

"Her mouth, Parker, is a perfect peach of a mouth. Seeing it, for the first time, I realized what a mouth can be, other than a temporary meat-safe. Her chin, Parker, is the sort of chin that should go with such a mouth as I have described. Her ankles, Parker, are equalled in daintiness only by her feet. If I may mention it in all reverence, her figure, Parker, is . . . What is the word I am looking for, Parker?"

"*Svelte*, sir?"

"*Svelte* it is," said Tony. "Her figure is *svelte*. Distinctly *svelte*."

"An attractive girl, I gather, sir."

"You haven't said the half of it," said Tony. "A very queen among women. What one might describe as a peacherino. A wow. Yet the chances are that I shall never see her again. A truly dreadful thought."

"It is indeed sad, sir," said Parker, "that we cannot each meet with our ideal mate."

"Mate?" said Tony. "I don't like the word. Companion, Parker, companion. Or, possibly, soul-mate."

Parker smiled slightly. He was a spruce, clean-shaven man of about forty, with a face that but seldom lost its expression of celestial calm. Yet, as Tony knew, behind that unpromising mask was a sense of humour second to none. If Parker saw a stout man slip on a banana-skin and fall on the back of his neck, his eyebrows might lift a fraction of an inch, denoting polite sympathy; and that was all the world would see. If he was present at the murder of one Chicagoan gangster by another, he might seem to call to question their good taste in doing this in the open street—no more. He went through life as if it was one long game of poker with the roof off and the sky the limit.

The car drifted on along the dusty road. Others proceeding in the same direction overtook and passed it; for Tony was in reflective mood. Within the next seven days he might meet the girl he was to marry, and complete the conquest. That was a sobering thought. He had no desire to marry; but he preferred the idea of marriage to the idea of work, and once determined on the step would seek the holy bonds of matrimony as fervently as hitherto he had avoided them. There were no half-measures about Tony. But at the same time he saw no reason why he should turn

his necessity into a penance, and he had very definite ideas as to the sort of girl he wanted as a wife.

She must not, for instance, be older than himself. So many rich girls were old; they seemed to become spinsters more readily than their poorer sisters. He supposed that was because they grew suspicious of a fellow's motives. Well, with his Rolls-Royce and his reputation, Tony thought himself safe on that point.

Nor must she be positively plain. Tony had a very nice appreciation of feminine beauty, though hitherto he had observed it with a wary eye. And her nature . . . Tony sighed. He suspected her nature would be permanently soured when she made the discovery that he had married her bank-book. Maybe she'd look for a divorce. He'd better be careful not to make any false statements about his financial status. Leave that to her imagination. . . .

"Parker," Tony said, "do you know anything about making love?"

"Love, sir?"

"Love," said Tony. "You'll have read about it in novels of the desert and sheiks and burning passion and the tropical moon, when hearts throb like tomtoms and the heroine is deprived of everything but her natural beauty by the hawk-eyed leader of the savage Bedouins, in reality a Duke who left home because he was suspected of petty larceny and the police had discovered his address. You'll also have heard of it in the theatre, where at regular intervals

the comic parlourmaid ejaculates: 'Ain't love grand!' when the butler, whose intentions, we fear, are not above suspicion, embraces her. Then again we meet with it in the Sunday papers, and even more often in the American tabloids, which I have seen you study with an expression of avid, not to say foul, interest. I think you know what love is, Parker. What I want is a few tips on making it."

"My personal experience, sir," said Parker, "has been slight, and confined to earlier years; but I have studied others in the condition commonly referred to as love, and the chief requirements appear to be loss of appetite, and a glassy expression of the eyes, as if the victim suffered from some dreadful disease. As indeed, sir," Parker concluded, "he does."

"Cut out the low comedy," said Tony. "How does one make a favourable impression on a female, Parker?"

"By presenting her with jewellery or a blank cheque, sir."

"No, no! Nothing of a mercenary character."

"Then, sir," said Parker, "I fear the impression made will be far from favourable. But there are books on the subject. . . ."

"Sent in a plain wrapper?" said Tony. "Again let me remind you that the Wayne morals are above reproach. Even if they were not, no book would be needed. The facts of life, Parker, have not escaped me. What I want is a hint or two on how to make

love innocently and beautifully as a flower lifts its face to the sun, or a hurt child turns to its mother. Or thereabouts. You apprehend me?"

"Perfectly, sir. I have heard that a moon . . ."

"Ah! A moon."

"And a little music, sir."

"Music. Such as our ukulele?"

"Even so, sir. And perhaps a song. . . ."

"You think so?"

"The feminine mind is unfathomable, sir. Then I have been told that, to some, a touch of brutality is acceptable."

"Brutality?"

"Such as clasping them unexpectedly and violently to the bosom, sir."

"Clinching," said Tony. "Proceed."

"And bruising their lips with passionate kisses, sir."

"What about a straight left to the solar plexus?" said Tony. "No use being half-hearted about things, you know. Or a good, strong kick? Or a little of that jolly old school pastime, arm-twisting? The idea seems capable of development, Parker."

"These brutalities, sir, if they are to bring anything besides a summons for assault, must go to prove the depth and sincerity of your love."

"You don't think a whang on the ear would answer the purpose?"

"I gravely doubt it, sir. But sudden, close embraces, and scorching kisses, combined with incoherent speech

and convulsive shuddering, should convey the desired impression."

"H'm!" said Tony dubiously.

"And a little judicious flattery has been known to work wonders, sir. A woman will believe anything of a complimentary nature."

"Seems to me," said Tony, "this business of making love isn't so simple as people seem to think. It is, so to speak, not all jam."

"The most dangerous profession in the world, sir," said Parker, "is being a lover. At any moment you might be accepted."

"Cheerful sort of ghoul, aren't you? The little ray of sunshine. Parker, the life of the party. You speak to a man who has determined to take the plunge."

"Indeed, sir?" Parker showed a faint stirring of interest. "May I offer you my congratulations, sir, and at the same time ask who is the fortunate young lady?"

"I don't know yet. I haven't met her. But I have a premonition she exists."

"Then you have had enough of bachelorhood, sir?"

"Not nearly enough," said Tony sadly. "But duty is duty. The noble name of Wayne must go down to future generations. When William the Conqueror landed wherever it was that William the Conqueror landed, who rode beside him carrying the royal bludgeon? Who, Parker, but Edwin de Wayne, widely known as Edwin the Plugugly, or on occasion

as Eddie the Wop. When Henry the Eighth wanted a divorce from his third wife, who was it he had supply the evidence? I ask you, Parker. Who, again, but Montmorency Wayne, known at court as Monty the Sheik because of his snappy dressing and his habit of running after young married ladies? Keep your ears open, Parker, and you'll get a few sidelights on history. Who was it, I ask you, was Drake's opponent in the famous game of bowls, and took a hundred guineas off him as clean as a whistle while the Armada sailed up the Channel? None other than Percival Wayne, nicknamed Slick because of his skill in rolling the bones. And, a hundred years or so later, who do we find carrying on an amour of a more passionate than prudent nature with every pretty chorus-girl in Town, under the benevolent eye of Charles the Second? Another Wayne, Parker, hight John or Mousey, but scarcely ever mentioned in the family because of his reputation, which was distinctly lurid even for those jovial times, when men were men and women were bold. When Wellington's horse was shot under him at Waterloo, who stole the saddle and bridle and later sold them as curiosities? Benjamin Wayne, Parker, sometimes referred to as Moses, he having been born blind to the difference between mine and thine. We Waynes, Parker, are an illustrious family. We have been everything from Royal Bludgeon-Bearers to pick-pockets; but we have never worked. Shall this noble race die out because the only bearer of the name shirks

his duty? Assuredly not! Casabianca has nothing on us when it comes to duty. You might retort that being burned to death is a more or less speedy and enjoyable end when compared with marriage; but no true Wayne ever thinks of himself. Our family motto, Parker, being in Latin, you wouldn't understand; but it means 'Others First', and was selected in remote ages by the head of the family as he lay dying from a wound in the back inflicted on him as he preceded an enemy through the front door of his castle."

"Indeed, sir?"

"So you perceive the necessity for the more sober outlook, Parker?"

"Quite, sir. I trust, sir, this will not mean a severance of relations between us?"

"Not on your life!" said Tony. "Unless circumstances at present unforeseen arise."

"I fear I do not understand, sir."

"Well," said Tony, grasping at the first excuse that came his way, "the little wife might not appreciate your sterling qualities, Parker, as I do."

"Thank you, sir."

"But there's no need to shake hands with the devil before we meet him."

"Precisely, sir."

"Or perhaps 'her' would be more correct. But I think we near our destination."

The car now glided along a quiet country road shadowed by trees and lined with hedges where birds

twittered and wildflowers showed pink and white faces like elves peeping from their house of leaves. Larks trilled in the blue overhead, and from the direction of the sea came the plaint of gulls, unceasing, mournful.

"When last down here," Tony said, "I was a chubby, smooth-faced lad of fifteen or thereabouts, so angelically innocent that I believed almost anything I was told. Ah, time flies, time flies! How I have changed since then! Now, Parker, I believe nothing of what I hear and very little of what I see.

"Yet this road seems much the same as my boyhood memories cherish it. Here, Parker, I made to bleed the nose of an uncouth youth who referred to me in such insulting terms as sissy and mamma's darling, being misled by the fact that my collar happened to be clean.

"Over there, Parker, I smoked my first cigar, with results disastrous to myself, but no doubt beneficial, in obedience to Nature's golden rule, to the surrounding grass. Over yon ivied wall, Parker, I climbed to steal apples which later gave me a severe stomach-ache. Joyous days, joyous days! A stomach-ache now, Parker, costs me anything from five guineas up.

"Over yon fair field, Parker, I ran with some objectionable old man hot upon my heels, at times causing me to accelerate with a whang of his cane, merely because I had potted a few of his pheasants with an air-gun. You will be glad to hear that in the

end I outdistanced him, and that as a result of his exertions he was seriously ill for a month. Providence protects the weak, Parker, not to mention a fair turn of speed."

"Quite, sir," said Parker.

Lordly gates came into view, opening on an avenue of beeches. Tony swung the Rolls in, then halted her as he saw George spring from the undergrowth like some startled denizen of the wild.

"Greetings, George. And how are we?"

"Hello, Tony. Pretty fair. I've news for you."

"You intrigue me," said Tony. He opened the door and stepped out. "On, Parker, on! We follow. Now, George, come across. To relapse into the vernacular, spit it out."

"You remember what you were telling me the other day?" said George, glancing about like an assassin planning the murder of a Grand Duke. "About marrying for money, I mean?"

"Yes, yes!" said Tony impatiently. "It has not slipped my mind."

"Well," said George, "the very girl you want is here."

"Here?"

"Here. Right here at Hawkscliff. I met her in a night-club, and invited her down."

"She is . . . er . . . a desirable wife?" said Tony.

"If it wasn't for you, I'd marry her myself."

"She has the stuff?" said Tony, not very eagerly.

"Oodles and oodles. She's an heiress from Chicago, touring Europe for pleasure."

"Chicago?" Tony said gloomily. "You meant Chicago?"

"Think of her money," said George. "Oodles and oodles and oodles."

"There's that about it," Tony nodded. "But Chicago!"

"What of it?" George said impatiently. He had begun to regret his choice of a home-town for his heiress.

"True!" said Tony. "True! Her relatives may not be crooks. After all, it is possible that there are honest citizens of Chicago. But the prospect of living there appals me."

"She tells me," said George, "she'd like to stay over here the rest of her life, and probably she will."

"Splendid! But why this zeal in the Wayne cause, friend of my boyhood?"

"Oh, well," said George uncomfortably, "we're pals, and all that sort of rot."

"You make me very proud," said Tony.

They walked on slowly under the whispering trees, shut in in a cool green twilight dappled here and there with gold. Each was thoughtful and preoccupied. They came to a long, sunny glade, where a stout little man with a butterfly-net prowled stealthily.

"And who," said Tony, "is the village idiot with the net?"

"The pater," said George.

"Oh! Ah! Yes?" said Tony. "Apologies. failed to recognize him. Chasing butterflies?"

"No," said George. "Buffaloes."

"This rancour," said Tony in reproof, "is unseemly with a guest."

The stout little man saw them, and approached, red-faced and genial.

"Dad," George said, "you remember Tony? Tony Wayne, you know."

"Of course, of course!" Mr. Trent said, wringing Tony's hand. "You're welcome, my boy." But his eye wandered.

"Hunting the elusive butterfly?" Tony said pleasantly. "Well, well! One must have a hobby, I suppose. Some slaughter elephants and hippos, some the wild pig, some the inoffensive grouse and pheasant, some the bugs that crawl beneath our feet. With you, it is the butterfly. Yes. Rather warm, isn't it?"

"They only come out when it's warm, you know," said Mr. Trent. His roving stare became settled, concentrated, baleful. Net aloft, he bounded off like a startled grasshopper, bent on the slaughter of some hovering insect. Tony and George went on their way.

A large white animal came towards them, pausing here and there to sniff inquiringly at rat-hole or rabbit-burrow, anon cocking a speculative eye at the squirrels in the trees. It was Bill the Bulldog, seeing what was to be seen in these new hunting-grounds. He

gambolled about George and Tony with elephantine manifestations of delight. With Bill, the past lay dead and buried, the present was perfect, and the future looked good.

"Heavens!" said Tony. It didn't seem possible that there were two Bills in the world; but neither did it seem possible that the girl with the blue eyes was here at Hawkscliff.

"That's her dog," said George.

"Hers?"

"Yep. Bill. Big brute, isn't he?"

"There is a destiny that shapes our ends," said Tony reverently.

"Well," said George, "it made a sound job of his, didn't it?"

2

Denise, this afternoon, sat in the sun and watched the more energetic members of the party play tennis. She was drowsily content. To the present, her holiday had been an unqualified success. Mrs. Trent was kindly and affable, obviously unsuspecting. Mr. Trent, though he seemed a little mad, was friendly enough. And the other members of the gang made no attempt to hide their liking for her.

Everything, in the homely phraseology of the Bowery, was the cat's pyjamas. Already she had had two luxurious baths, and would presently have a third before dressing for dinner. To-morrow, she decided,

she would have breakfast in bed. And possibly she would go swimming if the day was fine. Bill would like that.

Best of all, George had kept his promise not to annoy her. She wondered idly why he had been so eager for her to come down if he had had no intention of forcing his suit. Well, it didn't matter. All was right with the world.

Denise thought about the other guests. Joan Harrington she frankly adored. For so popular an actress, Joan was wonderfully free of affectation, as natural as sunshine. Generous impulses and laughter bubbled in her like promises in a Jewish financier floating a company.

Then came Lady Patricia Glencombe, a slim, red-haired girl with cool, blue-green eyes. Lady Pat was pretty in an unusual way, and knew it. In addition, she was a born flirt, and whether or not she knew it was a problem that constantly exercised some minds. Those blue-green eyes of hers could be most provocative at times, when a single lazy glance from them was enough to make most men sit up and smooth back their hair.

The men, Denise decided, were a pretty ordinary lot. There was a young poet named Sprigg whose attitude showed plainly he was about to indite an ode to her; a long-haired young man, this, given to studied fits of abstraction.

Another who showed her marked attention chose to

be known as Comrade Wuthers, professing Socialistic beliefs. Denise very gently laughed at him, though his habit of wearing a red tie, even at dinner, grated on her. Comrade Wuthers was so rich that he could afford to be a Socialist, turning to Leningrad as a Mohammedan turns to Mecca.

Joan, fanning herself with her hat, came and sat beside Denise.

"Warm, isn't it, Miss Brooks? Or may I call you Denise?"

"Please do!" Denise said eagerly. "I've been wishing you would."

"You know," Joan said laughingly, "you're not the least bit like other Americans I've met—I'd have said you were English."

"I was educated here," Denise said. "At Inglehurst. I suppose that explains it."

"It would."

A cream-coloured Rolls-Royce came up the avenue, turned widely in front of the house, and halted. A quietly-dressed man stepped out, glanced about him with an air of superiority, and went to the door. An instant later one of the footmen carried Tony's cases into the hall.

"That looks like Tony Wayne's car," Joan said lazily. "But that's not Tony. Have you ever met Tony?" She laughed a little. "Tony's really a dear, but the most ungallant thing alive. He has more money than any boy his age should have, and he suffers from

the delusion that every girl he meets wants to marry him as the shortest way of getting to his bank-account. I've met him a few times, and I've always felt he suspected my motives. Some old dame tried to marry her daughter to him a few years ago on the Riviera, and the next thing heard of Tony was that he was in the middle of Africa, shooting lions."

"I don't like men like that," Denise said with finality.

"Oh, Tony's all right."

They were silent a while, each immersed in her own thoughts; Joan contrasting Denise to other Americans she had met; Denise wondering what mischief Bill was up to now.

"It's Tony all right," Joan said. "Here he comes with George."

Denise, recognizing Tony, observed him with conflicting emotions. He was carelessly elegant, his soft hat tilted at precisely the correct angle, rakish yet restrained. Beside him, George looked almost disreputable, dressed as he was in baggy flannels and a tennis-shirt open at the throat. Tony's face was wreathed in the quiet, contented smile of one who has been left a fortune by the miserly uncle. That was more or less how Tony saw it, with Fate playing the part of the uncle and Denise the part of the fortune.

"Miss Harrington, surely?" Tony said, beaming. "You remember me? The shy boy with the haunted smile."

"I've dreamed of you," Joan nodded. "Most often after a heavy supper. I was always chasing you up a stony mountain, trying to lasso you with a wedding-ring on the end of a rope, and you were squealing like a rat. But somehow you dodged me. This is Miss Brooks, from Chicago. Denise, Mr. Wayne."

"Charmed," said Tony. "George, could you not think up some little thing about the beauty of England and America seated side by side? No? Come, come; churn up the old brain. Ah, well, the beauties will see what I mean. I have always observed," Tony said thoughtlessly, "that beauty is hawk-eyed in these matters."

He lifted a chair, placed it between the two girls, and settled himself at ease, his long legs crossed, his hands clasped upon his waistcoat. George squatted down on the grass beside Joan, and gazed moodily at nothing in particular. Bill stretched himself under his mistress's chair and feigned sleep, snapping now and then at a troublesome fly.

"A peaceful scene," said Tony. "Reminiscent of the old home farm."

No answer being vouchsafed him, after a short silence he continued:

"It reminds me," he said, "of a poem inflicted on me in my youth, and which, having its action, so to speak, in God's Own Country, might be of interest to you, Miss Brooks. Unless my memory lies, as it very

probably does, this painful effusion ran somewhat in the following manner. To wit:

“ ’Twas on Lake Erie’s broad expanse, one bright
midsummer day,
The gallant steamer *Ocean Queen* swept proudly
on her way.
Bright faces clustered on the deck, or peering o’er
the side,
Watched carelessly the sparkling foam that flecked
the rippling tide.

“You have there,” said Tony, “the suggestion of peace so noticeable here, the happy, carefree attitude adopted by our friends at the nets. But hark! What threatens?

“But who beneath that cloudless sky, that smiling
bend serene——

“What a bend is,” Tony said apologetically, “I do not know. Not in the sense evidently implied, anyway. Or perhaps my memory is at fault on the word. To resume:

“But who beneath that cloudless sky, that smiling
bend serene,
Could dream that danger, awful, vast, impended
o’er the scene?
Could dream that e’er an hour had sped, that frame
of sturdy oak,
Would sink beneath the lake’s blue waves,
blackened with fire and smoke?

"We can only conclude," said Tony, "that the *Ocean Queen* was a rum-runner operating on the lake, and that she was captured this day either by Federal agents or by hi-jackers. Probably the former, as hi-jackers would hesitate to destroy the vessel, which was doubtless valuable, and if left afloat would bring more cargoes for them to hi-jack. However, apart from illustrating my point that before us we have a peaceful scene, the poem is of no importance whatever. What part of the States do you come from, Miss Brooks?"

"Chicago," said Denise.

"A charmingly rural spot," said Tony.

George started suddenly to life. Tony's knowledge of Chicago might make any discussion of that city dangerous.

"Feel like a game of tennis, Tony?"

"No," Tony sighed. "No, no. I feel like the frog in the poem, which lay panting, dying, and, I believe also expiring. My stamina is exhausted, and so am I. I feel like one of these 'Before Treatment' photographs we see in the papers. Let us while away the hours with conversation of a high intellectual degree, refreshing our minds without tiring our bodies. You were speaking of Chicago, I think, Miss Brooks?"

"No," said Denise, "I was not."

"You are right," said Tony. "It was I. From New York, Chicago is reached, I believe, by the New York Central Railroad, which for some distance runs beside the River Hudson, on its way passing a rest-house where

many of America's most famous men have stayed. If they have not," said Tony, "they should have. I refer, of course, to Sing-Sing Penitentiary."

A gurgle of laughter from Denise made him concentrate his attention on her.

"In Chicago itself," he said, "I have spent many a happy hour. Chicago is never dull. One can always be sure of seeing a brush between rival gangs, a murder, or a hold-up in the course of one's morning walk. If lucky, one may see all three, or several of each, with a few clubbings of pedestrians by policemen thrown in. The citizens of Chicago are not neurotic. No. Discharge an automatic pistol behind one, and he will not even glance around. He will spring for the nearest doorway like a rabbit touched by a stray pellet of shot. Turn a machine-gun loose down the street, and, with the inevitable exception of the dead, the street will be empty in two seconds. But the 'Business as Usual' sign will be up around the next corner.

"For anyone without nerves, who has no desire to reach an advanced age, and who likes to have his valuables stolen periodically, Chicago is the ideal spot. If you want a man murdered, lure him to Chicago. If the crooks hesitate because he has an aged mother and seventeen children dependent on him, the police will oblige.

"If you have any money, and wish to be relieved of it, go to Chicago. There will be no need to advertise. If you want your baby kidnapped, leave him alone an

instant in Chicago, and when you look again it will be a case of 'Oh where, oh where is my little boy gone, oh where, oh where can he be?' The paradise of crooks and the stamping-ground of Big Bill Thompson. You have never met Big Bill Thompson, Miss Brooks?"

"Never," said Denise.

"A noisy gentleman," said Tony. "Yes. He has been Mayor, I believe, twice. Very popular, it is said, with the coloured and less desirable element. You have not met him, Miss Brooks?"

"No," said Denise.

"A pity!" said Tony. "A very great pity. To meet Big Bill must be an education. Even to hear him is as good as a seat in the stalls. A born low comedian, Big Bill. He makes all America laugh. But who comes?"

A young man approached along the drive. He had a straw hat on the back of his head, and a suitcase in each hand, and he was dressed in grey flannels. His face was thin and brown. He looked energetic. The heat seemed to cause him little or no embarrassment.

"Good Lord!" said George, staring.

"Heavens!" Joan said, staring. This was the young man whose paper she had torn.

"Ah!" said Tony pleasantly, staring. "Some horrid spectre risen from George's past."

"Horrid spectre," said George, "is right. It's my cousin." He waved, and the young man in grey flannels turned towards them, dropping the suitcases.

"Hello, George," he said, holding out his hand.

"Dave, isn't it?" George said, without enthusiasm. "We didn't know you were back."

"For a year," said the brown young man. "For good, if I like to stay. If auntie is willing, I shall spend at least six months here."

"Oh!" said George. "Yes. . . . Of course. We'll be delighted." He turned, smiling crookedly. "Let me introduce some friends. Miss Harrington, my cousin, the Rev. David Selwyn. . . ."

3

There are moments so surcharged with emotion as to defy description by even the most facile pen, and before which Gorki himself might shy like a cinema mule stung by a judiciously-planted load of bird-shot. Such, for instance, as follow immediately on a sporting gentleman's learning that the horse which a friend has persuaded him not to back has cantered home at forty to one.

Such was the moment that followed George's pronouncement of his cousin's name. Tony, sensing something electric in the atmosphere, uncurled his legs, and observed the Rev. David with a little more interest. The Rev. David, his jaw dropped, stared at Joan. Joan, her jaw dropped, stared at the Rev. David. George, frowning, glanced from one to another of them and swore under his breath. Even Denise sat up a trifle straighter, her eyes wide. Only Bill the Bulldog,

panting like a hippopotamus in the shadow of the Great Change, remained unaware that something was due to happen.

"Do you know each other?" said George.

"We have met," said Joan; and the Rev. David quailed. "Oh, yes, we know each other quite well."

"Old friends," said Tony hopefully, "overcome with emotion. Often I have felt like that myself, on unexpectedly encountering a chum of my boyhood days who grasped the opportunity to remind me that I owed him some paltry trifle."

"I doubt," said Joan, "if you ever felt as I do now." Like a feminine Ancient Mariner, she held her victim with a glittering eye. "If you had, you'd be serving a sentence for justifiable homicide."

The Rev. David backed a few steps.

"George," he said rapidly, "if you will come a little distance towards the gates with me . . ."

"I am," said the Rev. David. "Yes, yes." "You're not going?" said George eagerly.

"At once. Now. If you will come a little way with me. . . . I must not miss the train. . . ."

"Please don't go," said Joan sweetly. "I'd be so glad if you'd only stay! I have so much to say to you."

"Good afternoon!" said the Rev. David a little wildly. He turned towards his suitcases.

But it was not to be. As he bounded forward, a full, rich voice arrested him as if he had been hit with a half-brick behind the ear.

"My darling Dave!"

"Oh, Moses!" said the Rev. David.

Mrs. Trent, both arms out, bore down on him like a frigate under full sail. She was a majestic woman, given to amplitudes and curves, but only slightly retarded by them. Her friends declared she was as lively as a girl of seventeen, and in moments of weakness Mrs. Trent admitted she felt no older. Her critics said things less kindly, thereby endangering their chances of salvation.

"Dave!" she cried, sweeping him into her embrace, despite his half-hearted attempt to side-step. "My little sister's boy!" She kissed him on both cheeks, and showed an inclination to weep on his shoulder.

"Dave's in a hurry, *mater*," George said.

"Nonsense!" said his mother briskly, deciding to reserve her tears. "How long are you home for, Dave?"

"A year, Auntie," said the Rev. David. "But, as George says, I must be going. I must not miss the next train. It is important that I leave at once. . . ."

"Pooh!" said his aunt. "Dave, dear boy, don't talk nonsense. Come inside and tell me all about the wonderful work you've been doing for the poor heathen."

"I hope," Joan said, "you'll have Mr. Selwyn tell us of his work some day, Mrs. Trent. I should love to

hear how he purified the stage for the cannibal Bomongos."

"Of course, dear," said her hostess. "I am eager to hear of that magnificent work myself."

"Wouldn't it be just too wonderful," said Joan, "if you could persuade him to give us a lecture. He was telling us how he founded a Purer Plays League, and a Clean the Stage Committee. . . ."

"You splendid boy, Dave!" Mrs. Trent exclaimed rapturously. "Of course, you must do as Miss Harrington suggests. But now come inside and tell me all about it first. My, how you've grown! And how stern you look!" She took his arm, led him unresisting towards the house, a broken, beaten man. The four sitting there heard the even flow of her voice die gradually to silence.

"All this," said George at length, "is very mysterious. Can you explain without breaking any confidences, Joan?"

"This," said Joan, producing a folded strip of paper from her pocket, "explains everything." She handed it to him. He read it quickly, scowling, and passed it to Denise, who in turn yielded to Tony. Then they looked at one another.

"The blister!" said George, in a tone of repressed fury. "I always knew he was a bad egg; but I never dreamed he'd descend to this."

"A man who writes to the papers," said Tony, "is beyond the pale. He deserves no pity."

"He'll get none," said Joan.

"I could *kick* him," said Denise, looking down at her little feet.

"A worthy impulse," Tony approved, "and one that agitates my own strong right leg."

"All these years," said George, "he must have been getting worse. He'll be a blight on the whole party. He'd spoil a wedding any day, and make the bride and groom think they were steeped in sin. His only pleasure is convincing people they're worms. He's the human skunk, the chilblain on the one-legged man's big toe. He is," said George heatedly, "a wart. The sight of him makes me think I have an attack of the jim-jams." He brooded a moment, then finished in hollow tones. "What Uncle Dave was thinking of, not to drown him at birth, escapes me."

"A knotty problem," said Tony. "One that exercises the greatest minds of our time."

"He'll be sorry he wasn't drowned," Joan said, "before I'm finished with him. I have a whole week, and when I say I'll make use of it, I don't mean maybe. But I'd like to see that letter. I wonder if he kept it?"

"He would," said Tony. "Yes. I think so. Probably he is proud of it. He may even have it framed in his room, between the texts, 'Home, Sweet Home' and 'A Boy's Best Friend is His Mother'."

"Oh, well!" said George, more optimistically. "I suppose we'll be able to get away from him now and

then. Will you come for a stroll around the gardens, Joan?"

Joan nodded, stood up. She wanted to leave Tony and Denise to form their own opinion of one another.

"Fancy meeting you," said Tony, when the others were beyond hearing.

"Strange, isn't it?" said Denise.

"The ways of Fate," said Tony, "are inscrutable." He moved his chair a few inches closer to hers, and subjected her to a quiet, long, penetrating stare.

"Is there anything the matter?" said Denise.

"How beautiful you are!" said Tony, in a low voice.

Denise started. This didn't conform to Joan's description of Tony's ways with the fair sex.

"Your eyes," said Tony, "are like still blue pools in a field of lilies, your hair like leaves paling beneath the first caress of winter. Your teeth are pearls from the Gulf of Persia, and consequently of the finest water, and the lips that hide them are like rose-buds crushed against the alabaster of your cheeks. Your throat is white and slender as the neck of a swan, and . . ."

"I'd better stop you before you go any further," said Denise. "You haven't been drinking, have you?"

"I am drunk with your beauty," said Tony. He congratulated himself on turning that rather neatly.

"Well," said Denise, "if that's what's wrong with you, you'd better become a teetotaler at once."

"I beg your pardon?" said Tony.

"Stop looking at me," said Denise. "After all, you

managed to struggle along before you saw me, so you could manage again."

"Ah!" said Tony. "But who, having seen Paradise, would willingly return to earth?"

"You'd better return as soon as you can," said Denise, "or you'll wake up in a home. I know what's wrong with you, Mr. Wayne. You've been out in the sun without a hat."

With a friendly smile she stood up quickly, and walked over to the courts.

"The Wayne stock," Tony said, "sinks. But it shall soar again. You hear me, Bill? Mark well my words."

4

Dinner was a quiet affair, despite Mr. Trent's racy account of how an extremely rare butterfly had escaped by an inch the sweep of his net, and his better half's efforts to stimulate a discussion on the progress of Christianity, as represented by the Rev. David in Darkest Africa, as represented by the Bomongos.

The guests were interested in neither Mr. Trent's butterfly nor the Rev. David's converts, and only their politeness kept them from saying so. Mr. Trent they regarded as a trifle mad, and the Rev. David as a meddlesome ass who couldn't leave the poor niggers to seek salvation their own way. If the niggers, one old gentleman demanded afterwards of Tony, wished to worship their own ju-jus, why not, goddamit, let 'em? Who cared whether a nigger was saved or not,

anyway? Besides, niggers hadn't souls any more than other animals.

"A convincing argument," said Tony. "Indeed, sir, insurmountable."

Tony, seated between two of the older ladies, looked about him with the eye of an alley cat fasting a week. Joan he already knew, and liked. Joan would make a presentable wife for any man. Plenty of money, too, though necessarily not up to the standard of an heiress from Chicago. Tony thought he could get along pretty well with Joan, provided she didn't turn snooty when she found he'd married her for her money. He supposed she'd want to continue her stage career, too. But she had a sense of humour, and that counted for much. Tony thought he'd almost prefer work to marrying a woman without a sense of humour.

Yes, Joan was all right. But she might not be keen on marriage. These actresses . . . Well, anyway, Tony had decided, it should be worth while getting a bit more chummy with her, in case the little lady from Chicago continued to hand him the frozen mitt.

"I *do* think, Mr. Wayne," said the lady on Tony's left, "missionaries lead *such* romantic lives. I mean, they're so romantic, aren't they?"

"Quite," said Tony. "Oh, quite!" He wasn't at all sure what she was talking about.

"I mean negroes, and fetishes, and black magic, and all that. . . ."

Tony's eye wandered on down the table. He had

yet to meet the majority of the guests; but from what he could see of them the prospect looked like a rainy sky. If it wasn't for Joan and the blue-eyed girl from Chicago, he'd have regretted coming at all. . . . His eye wandered on, disinterestedly; not dull, but listless. Joan and the little girl with the blue eyes. . . .

Something closely allied to an electric shock ran through him; he felt like the man who, stepping from the bath, puts his foot down firmly on the soap. He was guilty of a slight gasp, which made the lady on his right suspect him of bolting his food. He looked down at his plate, used knife and fork for a moment, then raised his glass, and across its brim met the gaze of Lady Patricia Glencombe.

Lady Pat was sandwiched between the poet and the Socialist, and was bored. She took no interest in either poetry or Socialism, and found it trying to have the young gentleman on her right pour blank verse into one ear, while the young gentleman on her left quoted verbatim long and involved speeches by Lenin into the other. Lady Pat, just then, considered herself a martyr. Her patience came to an end when Sprigg began on his own work, having exhausted Tennyson and Byron.

“‘The grey, grey sky, heavy and sodden [said Sprigg],

Droops o'er the trees like a wet woollen blanket,
And my spirit shivers as the leaves shiver,
Even as the leaves shiver my spirit shivers,
Under the grey, grey sky.’

"What do you think of that, Lady Patricia?"

"I think I should buy something for it," said Lady Pat.

"I beg your pardon?" said Sprigg. "For what?"

"Your spirit," said Lady Pat, cheerfully. "Something to keep it from shivering. A woollen blanket, perhaps. Though I believe they're very expensive now. Real wool, I mean."

Sprigg laughed hollowly, and turned to his food. And Lady Pat turned to Comrade Wuthers, whose chatter was annoying her.

"Please, Mr. Wuthers——"

"Comrade, Lady Patricia, Comrade," said Wuthers cordially.

Had Lady Pat fallen to temptation, she would have replied tersely, "Comrade, my eye!" But the breeding of centuries prevailed, though for an instant she wavered between impulse and politeness.

"Comrade, then," she said. "I'd like to ask you something, please."

Comrade Wuthers simpered, and in a few choice words laid his knowledge at her feet.

"Just a little thing," said Lady Pat, apologetically. "But rather important to me. If all these wonderful things you've been telling me about came to pass, what would happen to me?"

"You mean, would you be in danger?" said Comrade Wuthers cautiously.

Lady Pat nodded. "Would I?"

"Theoretically," said Comrade Wuthers, "yes. Actually, no." He liked the sound of that, and repeated it. "Theoretically, yes; actually, no."

"I see," said Lady Pat in relieved tones. "Thanks ever so much, Comrade Wuthers. But it's all nonsense, anyway, isn't it?" She waved a hand to silence his protests. "I mean, you don't really believe in it, do you? If you did, you'd give away all your money, and nobody ever hears of anybody giving away money. Taking it away, yes; but giving it away, no. Maybe I'm wrong, of course; but that's the basic principle of Socialism, isn't it? Everybody's to have the same amount of everything, and that high-falutin' rot. You wouldn't," said Lady Pat serenely, "believe in that, Comrade Wuthers. Nobody with any money *could*. So please don't tell me you do, because I don't believe you."

"But . . ." protested Comrade Wuthers.

"Your Socialism," said Lady Pat, "begins and ends with wearing a red tie. And if that's what Socialism means, me for the old regime every time."

Comrade Wuthers smiled feebly, and turned to his food.

Lady Pat, left thus in peace, looked down the table. She had begun to wonder why she had accepted Mrs. Trent's invitation, when she saw Tony. Tony looked interesting. Very interesting, Lady Pat decided. If his gaze continued to advance down the table as it did

at present, he'd see her in a moment. Lady Pat put her soul into her eyes.

Tony saw a slim, red-headed girl in green, pale, lovely, with the most bewitching eyes. She reminded him of a dandelion with its golden head and slim green stem. Why, he asked himself, hadn't he seen her before? So far as looks were concerned, she could rank with either Joan or the little lady from Chicago. He wondered if she was rich.

Lady Pat saw a pleasant young man who stared an instant, then turned his attention to his plate. Lady Pat was annoyed. She knew she looked better than a plate of food, except, perhaps, to a starving man. Tony neither looked nor ate as if he were starving. Lady Pat was intrigued. Never before, even with men far advanced in years, had she failed so signally.

She was speculating as to whether or not Tony's eyesight was defective, when he raised his glass. And Lady Pat knew then that the week wasn't going to be so boring as she had feared. When a young man looked at her like that, Lady Pat knew she had him by the short hairs. He was putty in her hands. And when it came to that sort of putty, Lady Pat was an ambitious artist.

Tony continuing to gaze at her with admiration tinged with awe, Lady Pat glanced lazily at the young gentleman on her left, then at the young gentleman on her right, and, finally, with an expression of anguish fleeting but poignant, at the ceiling. Then

her bewitching eyes returned to Tony, and she smiled. Tony tried to convey the impression of quivering all over. Lady Pat began to anticipate with a certain impatience her meeting with this pleasant young man.

Denise, a little distance from Tony, observed all this with some amusement. Denise was a broad-minded girl; she held that a little mild flirting between the ages of eighteen and thirty did nobody any harm. Not that she indulged in it herself—the girl who works for her living must exercise more discretion than her fortunate sisters. Besides, Denise wasn't sure she knew any man she'd like to flirt with, even mildly. But she saw no harm in Tony and Lady Pat amusing themselves in that manner. Denise knew that a smile and a kiss here and there make this world brighter without lessening anyone's chances in the next. And people with so much money as Tony and Lady Pat had nothing to do but flirt.

For the Rev. David Selwyn dinner was a nightmare, and for a reason that with most men would have seemed good grounds for seeking a divorce. Joan sat directly opposite him, and whenever he ventured to lift his eyes she smiled at him. She had a wonderful smile; but the Rev. David found it reminiscent of the grin of a lioness crouched to spring. The Rev. David was sorry he had left Africa, where the only dangers to be encountered were from wild beasts and savages with decided homicidal tendencies. He was sorrier still that he had gone to see *Who Says So?* and sorriest

of all for that ill-timed letter to the Press. While partaking of the best the Trent board could offer, he threw dust and ashes on his head. Some wild spirit, he was assured, had possessed him, making him set pen to paper. Like a man, he thought, signing his own death-warrant. Of course, after seven years up-country, *Who Says So?* had been rather shocking—or startling might be a better word.

At this point in his reflections the Rev. David glanced across the table, met Joan's eye, and quailed. Joan chuckled.

As Mrs. Trent rose, Tony looked at Lady Pat, then towards the gardens, then again at Lady Pat, raising his brows. Almost imperceptibly, Lady Pat nodded, glanced at her watch, and twice quickly spread the fingers of her left hand. Tony looked faintly reproachful; but she did not relent, shaking her head as she left the room.

"George," Tony said a moment later, "who's the red-haired girl in green?"

"Red-haired girl in green?" George said absently.

"With goo-goo eyes," said Tony.

"Oh, that's Lady Pat. Lady Patricia Glencombe. Weren't you introduced?"

"No," said Tony. "But we're going to be. Has she any money?"

"Oodles," said George shortly.

On the terrace ten minutes later, Tony looked about him. A big moon rose behind the house; lawns and

gardens were bathed in soft golden light. Tony drew in a long, deep breath. The trees were whispering, and the murmur of the sea came gently to him as he stood there.

His questing eye caught the movement of a slim figure down in the rose-garden, and he lounged towards it, his footsteps noiseless on the green. It was Lady Pat, a cloak about her shoulders, her head bare. She gave him one white hand, and he brushed it with his lips, holding it an instant longer than was necessary.

She took his arm, and they went slowly on between the banks of sleeping blossoms. Fragrance was all about them, too, the moon made magic, so that almost despite themselves they were a little awed by the witching beauty that enveloped them, and went a while in silence.

Until they came at length to a rustic bower, and sat down side by side. And as they sat, a nightingale flung melody from some far coppice of the park, pouring out his heart in tender loveliness to serenade the moon; and a little hand came to rest on Tony's, and offered no resistance when his fingers closed about it. Tony then remembered he was here on business, not to hear some bird warble.

"Isn't it simply heavenly," Lady Pat breathed.

"Heavenly!" said Tony. "If only it could be like this always!" He sighed. "It makes one think, somehow, of those lines of Omar's—

“‘Ah Moon of my Delight, that know’st no wane,
The Moon of Heaven is rising once again,
How oft hereafter rising shall she look,
Through this same garden after me—in vain?’”

“How sweet!” whispered Lady Pat, who had heard that verse, under almost identical conditions, more often than she could well remember. “I wonder if I could learn that. . . .”

Tony spent the next ten minutes in teaching it to her. In the dusky shadow of the roses overhead her face gleamed pure and white as a lily, her eyes dark pools of mystery, her hair a raven black. Fragrance dripped down on them like dew as they sat there close together; and still the nightingale made love to the moon with all the glory of his voice. Handy things, nightingales, Tony thought. He must see about getting a few to have around the house.

When at length Lady Pat announced herself satisfied, a strange silence fell between them.

“Lady Pat,” Tony said at length, “do you believe in love at first sight?”

“Of course!” Lady Pat said, very softly.

Tony leaned a little forward. He wondered if he should risk kissing her; it was at times like these that experience proved useful, and experience he had none. She was very close to him, very lovely, very slender; he could just imagine his arm clamping around her waist. . . . But she seemed to trust him, and he

decided against the idea, tempting though it was, of pressing her to his starched shirt and smothering her with kisses. She might consider they hadn't known each other long enough for that.

"May I call you Tony, please?" Lady Pat murmured, shyly.

Tony repressed a start. So she had been making inquiries about him, had she, even as he had about her? That seemed promising.

"Do!" he said earnestly. "Do!" He plucked a rose, held it out to her. "If you would touch it with your sweet lips. . . . Ah! I swoon!" said Tony ecstatically. "Always I shall treasure this most beautiful of blossoms. My children's children shall gather about my knee . . ." He pulled himself up with a jerk; something warned him that that was the wrong note. "It shall lie next to my heart, and though its own fragrance fades and dies, the fragrance lent it by your lips, softer and redder than it could ever be, will live. Its petals may droop and wither; but my memory of you will be ever fresh, ever young and beautiful." He wrapped the blossom reverently in his handkerchief, and placed it in his pocket, while Lady Pat watched him with inscrutable dark eyes. "You know, Lady Pat . . ."

He paused to listen. Quick steps sounded at the far end of the garden, and a figure, dark in the moonlight, advanced towards them. It was the Rev. David. He saw them and would have retired; but Lady Pat called to him.

"Mr. Selwyn, do you hear that nightingale?"

"Yes," said the Rev. David. "Yes. Wonderful." He glanced nervously towards the house, and became a little calmer. "Wonderful, indeed."

"I sometimes think," said Tony, "that nightingales are the spirits of people dead, visiting a while their earthly haunts, and mourning through the quiet watches of the night."

"Ah!" said the Rev. David.

"You have a beautiful mind," Lady Pat murmured. "But you must excuse me." She held out one hand as Tony would have gone with her. "No, please. I know you want to stay and talk together." Was there laughter in her voice, Tony wondered, or the subtlest mockery? "Good night. . . ." She flitted away like some slender nymph, her shadow dancing at her heels.

"Have a cigar?" said Tony. This missionary-walla might be something the tide had washed up, but he was a fellow guest for all that, and at least conventional politeness was due to him.

"Many thanks," said the Rev. David.

"Wonderful night," Tony said, holding out a lighted match. The Rev. David puffed gratefully, then straightened with a sigh of relief.

"Man feels better when he has something to bite on. . . ."

"Yes?" said Tony.

"That affair this afternoon—you were there. About

Miss Harrington," said the Rev. David. "Shook my nerves all to pieces. She was stalking me after dinner, so I ran out here. I'm afraid of her," said the Rev. David. "Terrified. A charming girl, no doubt; but she doesn't understand. I want to apologize, to tell her I'm really sorry; and I haven't the pluck. I don't know—I must have been drunk when I wrote that damned letter."

Tony began to entertain a more kindly feeling for this earnest young man.

"Found it hard to understand myself," he admitted. "She wags a wicked knee; but . . . I mean, a fellow like you . . ." He chuckled.

"Like me?" said the Rev. David.

"Well, accustomed to seeing the gentle sex run around in a smile and God's kindly sunshine," said Tony. "I'd have imagined you were hardened, and that our most snappy chorus would leave you unmoved. But I suppose there's a difference between a white knee and a brown face."

"Yes, yes!" said the Rev. David hastily. "Oh, yes!" He changed the subject. "Have you ever been in Africa; Mr. Wayne?"

They talked about Africa, strolling there among the dreaming roses. And when, two hours or more afterwards, they separated outside the door of Tony's bedroom, Tony definitely liked the Rev. David Selwyn. An earnest young man, no doubt, not content to take life as a joke; but none the worse for that. There was

humour beneath his earnestness. He looked at things with an honest eye, and spoke with an honest tongue. A likeable young man.

"To bed, Parker," Tony said, yawning. "We have had an eventful day. Yes. If any bright schemes for winning a damsel's love come to you through the night, jot them down on the old memory. But don't lose any sleep over it. Something tells me we shall get along all right. We have an instinct in these things, Parker."

"Indeed, sir?" said Parker.

A low, melodious wail came from without, rising to a shriek that broke above the sounds of battle.

"Some feline maiden," Tony said, "defending her virtue with tooth and claw. You might help her by heaving out a lump of coal, Parker, if there's any in the grate." He crossed to the window, leaned out. The cats were not visible; but some distance along the wall another head was thrust into the moonlight. It was Lady Pat. Tony caught the wave of a white hand as she withdrew.

"We make progress," he said. "We make progress."

CHAPTER THREE

I

"PARKER," Tony said.

"Sir?" said Parker.

"Shave me."

"I am about to do so, sir."

"Make my face," said Tony, "smooth as a maiden's bosom, for we have brave deeds before us."

"I shall endeavour to do so, sir."

"I am, Parker, the general surveying the field of battle. I see my foes before me, and the spoils of victory; but how the fight will go I cannot tell, because, Parker, we have no plan of campaign."

"Am I correct, sir, in presuming that you intend to marry one of the three young ladies in whom you are interested?"

"You have a shrewd eye, Parker. Nothing escapes you."

"Thank you, sir." From his hip pocket Parker drew forth a slim volume, and proffered it to Tony. "By a peculiar coincidence, sir, Mrs. Harris, the house-keeper, found one of the younger maids reading this, and asked me to glance through it to see if it is fit for her perusal."

"A French novel?" said Tony, taking it. "No?"

'Passion Beautiful', by Dr. Imogen Green. As we would say in America, Parker, how come?"

"I thought the book might be of some assistance to you, sir, in your campaign."

"I think not," said Tony. "I think not." He glanced through the pages, and started suddenly. "Parker, have you read this?"

"No, sir."

"Don't," said Tony earnestly. "I don't want you to leave home. My word! Dear me!" He turned the page. "Good Heavens! And a woman wrote this! Can I believe my eyes? And you tell me one of the younger maids was reading it, Parker? Can I believe my ears? That's all right; you can give it back to her—when I'm shaved. She knows all there is to be known, and probably more." He fluttered the pages, pausing a moment here and there to glance through a paragraph. "Extraordinary! I'd never have guessed it. . . . H'mmm! . . . Dreadful, dreadful! A young girl reading this! Later in the day, Parker, she will be found hanging by her own garters—around her throat, Parker. This revelation of the facts of life, this shattering of her girlish illusions with regard to the garden gooseberry-bush or parsley-bed, will prove too much for her. She will decide to quit so base a world—by her own garters. And not only is it read by a woman, but written by a woman! Imogen Green. Imogen. . . . I conjure up visions of some sweet young thing with childish, wondering eyes. I think

of Iseult. Yet she writes this! She cannot be so green as her name would lead us to believe, Parker. Can it be that some grisly monster, some Rasputin, lurks behind that fair name? Can it be, Parker, that Imogen is a man?"

"You might be right, sir," said Parker dubiously. He slipped the book back into his pocket and began to strop the razor. Tony brooded.

"Parker."

"Sir?"

"Do I radiate sex appeal?"

"Not being a woman, sir, I cannot say."

"Then we rely on our natural charm," said Tony. "The open countenance and cheerful smile, the cultured word and dignified courtesy. Yes. And such wits as Nature gave us. Then we have the moon, of pleasing dimensions, and our ukulele. Reports from his training quarters indicate that Walloping Wayne is confident of victory. He packs a terrific punch in each eye, and the dazzling exhibition of his fangs when he smiles has been known to overcome his opponent in the first round. His lithe and graceful figure helps to render him almost irresistible, while his beautiful mind makes all who know him love him. Bookies are offering one hundred to one on, and even at this low figure takers are numerous."

"Now, sir, if you please," Parker said, ready with the soap.

"Be careful with the old windpipe, Parker; the last

of the Waynes is at your mercy. A slip, and where would we be? You, Parker, in the condemned cell; I in the cold, cold earth. . . . Make me smooth as velvet, Parker, or a little smoother, if you can manage it."

"As smooth, sir," Parker said, "as the confidence trickster who conjures money from a Jew."

Half an hour later Tony strolled into the breakfast-room, and found it empty but for the butler.

"Ah, Gregg, and how are we? Uppish, I trust?"

"Very well, Mr. Wayne, thank you, sir. Glad to see you again, sir."

"And I you," said Tony. "And I you. But are we late or early? My watch tells me it approaches nine. Have the other guests eaten yet?"

"A few, sir. Not many. I think I hear some coming now."

Joan and Denise entered, with Comrade Wuthers in close attendance.

"A beautiful morning," said Tony. "Too beautiful a morning to spend in bed. For the past three hours I have roamed the park, thinking high thoughts and listening to the birds."

"How did we miss you?" said Joan. "We've just come in."

"Possibly," said Tony, "it is because, with my customary unobtrusiveness, inherited from an ancestor who, as a safe-cracker, was famous in his day, I entered by the back." He beamed at Denise over his coffee;

the more he saw her, the more he liked her. "Our weather here, Miss Brooks, perhaps cannot equal America's; but to-day at least it's a good imitation, don't you think? We haven't had any rain for a week. And you must admit our bacon is superior to yours—let me help you to some." He did so, generously, while her blue eyes laughed at him.

"Hello, everybody," George said, entering. "Glorious morning, isn't it?"

"What's the programme to-day, George?" Tony said. "How do we pass the idle hours?"

"Any way you please," said George. "Tennis, golf, swimming, reading, sleeping, drinking flirting, curiosity-hunting, or what have you? You can lie on the middle of your back and absorb ozone and ultra-violet rays all day. But to-morrow will be different. The mater has a surprise for you. Personally," said George, glancing at Joan, "to-day I think I'd like a sail, and perhaps a swim, and maybe a round of golf after lunch. . . ."

Tony, facing them across the table, found himself comparing the two girls. Both were young, both were lovely, both were rich. He had, he supposed, an equal chance of winning either of them. Which would he prefer? On which of their fingers would he sooner slip the ring, to which of them give his name? Perhaps, to the hyper-critical eye, Joan was the more beautiful, but Denise's merry eyes and wistful mouth held a strange charm for Tony.

And what of Lady Pat? She, too, was young,

lovely, and rich. More, she showed a decided fondness for his company. Lady Pat must not be forgotten.

"It's hard to decide," Tony murmured; then realized he had given voice to his thoughts.

"What's hard to decide?" George demanded.

"What to do to-day," said Tony. "I vacillate between a brisk game of marbles and a visit to the cemetery." He looked kindly at the two girls. "Unless one of you would wish to come for a short drive with me, to admire the beauties of the countryside? See England first. Gladly would I ask you both; but George here regards me with an unbrotherly eye." That was true enough. "You are shy," Tony chided them. "Let me decide for you."

He took a shilling from one pocket, balanced it on his thumbnail. His quizzical glance was a challenge to them. "I may? You agree to abide by the rules? Heads, Miss Brooks comes; tails, Miss Harrington." He spun the coin, caught it deftly. "Tails it is. Thank you, Miss Harrington."

"The pleasure is mine," Joan said, laughing. "I'll keep you only ten minutes." She vanished upstairs, and with a genial nod Tony made for the garage.

He was at the wheel of the Rolls when George appeared, his eye more unbrotherly than ever.

"Keep off the grass!" George said unpleasantly. "This means you!"

"The idea of driving over your lawns," said Tony, "although brilliant, had not occurred to me."

"You know what I mean," said George. "You may marry Miss Brooks, or you may marry Lady Pat; but you won't marry Joan if I can prevent it."

"You pain me," said Tony. "You blight my future and take the sunshine from my life. But, friend of my boyhood, all is fair in love and war."

"Look here," George said in stifled tones, "if you ask Joan to marry you, I'll tell her about your finances, and your determination to marry for dough. As you say, all is fair in love and war."

"Again you pain me," said Tony. "Is this the way to treat a guest? Is this the famous Trent hospitality?" He deliberated a moment. "But we Waynes are not so easily defeated. We are hard-bitten. We are tough. We eat bear-meat. If you do this foul thing, George, a dreadful fate will befall you."

George laughed shortly.

"Laugh on!" said Tony. "Laugh on! But somewhere in London is an innocent young maiden, hopeful and trusting, who was, and may well be still, a mannequin in Trent's Mammoth Store. . . ."

George blenched.

"Who," Tony continued, "holds letters from the heir of the house of Trent. Her I shall seek out. . . ."

"All right; I give in," George said. "We'll fight fair. But we'll fight."

"We Waynes," said Tony, "are never averse from a sporting encounter. As the old Irishwoman said, we

sprang from nobody—we spring at them. And may the best man win.”

“He will,” said George.

“Thank you,” said Tony. He took his foot from the clutch-lever, and the car moved into the open. Joan, a slim figure in white, awaited him on the avenue. Denise and Comrade Wuthers were in the act of vanishing in the direction of the sea.

“Ready?” Tony said, opening the door.

“Five minutes,” Joan said severely, stepping in. “On, James.”

“My name is Tony, madam,” Tony said, pressing down the accelerator. The car shot down the avenue, swung through the gates, and gathered speed along the white highway.

“You’re in a hurry somewhere, Tony?” Joan said.

“No,” said Tony. “No.” He slowed down. “Where should we go?”

“Oh, just drive on. Anywhere. The world’s before us.”

“Wouldn’t it be wonderful,” said Tony, “if we went on and on like this, day after day, and week after week, until we’d seen all England’s beauty? Without worrying of yesterday or to-morrow, just living for the day and its happiness.”

“Wonderful,” Joan nodded. “While the weather lasted, anyway.”

“Let’s do it, then,” said Tony.

Joan laughed. “And what about our fair names?”

"That had not escaped me. We would get married first, of course."

"Tony," said Joan, "are you proposing?"

"Joan," said Tony, "I am. What about it?"

"But—we hardly know each other!"

"Nothing like marriage for settling that," said Tony. "Various authorities tell us so."

"I always thought you'd run from any girl who seemed ready to marry you."

"It grew to be a habit," Tony admitted. "Placed end to end, all the girls I've had try to marry me would make a presentable harem for the Grand Turk. But you are different. You and I could be very happy together."

"You weren't long finding it out," said Joan. "Are you really serious, Tony?"

"Deadly serious. You are only a bird in a gilded cage. Let me lead you to a fuller, freer life."

"This," said Joan, "is the queerest proposal I've ever had."

"Make it the last, then," suggested Tony. "Then you can always look back on it with pleasure."

"Of course," said Joan, "it's awfully nice of you. . . ."

"Ah!" said Tony, sadly.

"And a wonderful compliment——"

"No, no!"

"But I can't accept."

"Is there someone else?"

"No, there's not. But I don't know you long enough, and you don't know me long enough. It wouldn't be fair to either of us, Tony. You *must* realize that."

"Yes," said Tony. "How dreadful to marry a man and find that he uses a toothpick, or wears a nightshirt; or marry a woman and find that she puts her hair in papers at night. But we can wait until the end of the week."

"No," said Joan firmly. "That wouldn't be long enough, either. I like you very much, Tony; but I can't marry you because you want to marry me, or think you do."

"I am convinced," said Tony, "that we are soul-mates."

"Am I to take that seriously? Word of honour, Tony?"

"Well . . . no."

"When you're proposing," said Joan kindly, "always tell the truth." She patted his hand. "This your first, Tony?"

"Yes. And I had hoped it was to be my last."

"Poor boy! But you don't mind at all, you know."

"Joan!" Tony protested. "My heart is broken!"

"If it is, it'll be all right again by lunch-time. Please cheer up, if you want to prove your love for me."

"I would do anything for you," said Tony earnestly. "Anything! But don't ask me to smile with a broken heart."

"You'd do anything for me?" said Joan.

"Anything!"

"Would you steal for me?"

"One of the Wayne ancestors," said Tony, "was a pirate, another a highwayman, and another a lawyer. In me is the spirit, the daring, and the cunning of all three."

"I want you to steal a letter for me," said Joan.

"I'll steal the whole Post Office for you," said Tony.

"Thanks; but I wouldn't know what to do with it. This letter will be enough."

"Tell me where it is to be found, and it is yours."

"You'll find it," said Joan, "in one of Mr. Selwyn's pockets. I'm not sure which one. If it's not there, you might try his room."

"And how," said Tony, "am I to do this? Do you suggest bludgeoning him to a state of insensibility, and later going through his pockets at leisure? Or perhaps a few grains of cocaine in his whisky-and-soda?"

"I leave all that to you," said Joan. "Murder him if you please, and sink his body in the ornamental lake; but get that letter for me. I suppose you know the one I mean?"

"I can hazard a guess. His attack on the modern stage?"

Joan nodded.

"And what," said Tony, "to echo our national bard, is there in this for me?"

"My gratitude," said Joan. "Isn't that enough?"

"Make it your hand?" suggested Tony.

"No." She laughed, and blushed. "But if you must have something, I'll make it a kiss."

"Done!" said Tony. "The letter is yours." He thought a moment, then pressed on the accelerator so sharply that Joan clutched at his arm as the car leaped forward.

"What's all the hurry?"

"We must reach London and be back before lunch."

"Yes?" said Joan.

"Even so," said Tony, taking a bend in hair-raising manner. "Sit tight. Everything is well. You are with a Wayne."

"That's what's worrying me," said Joan.

Just about that time, George and the Rev. David strolled through the Hawkscliff gardens. To such straits was George reduced.

The Hawkscliff gardens are celebrated, and justly. Their roses are as large as cabbages. But neither George nor his cousin gave any thought to the roses this delightful morning.

"I can't understand," said George, with some heat, "why you should have chosen Miss Harrington for mention, of all the girls on the London stage. The devil," said George, "must have had a hand in it. You've put me in bad with her, just when I was screwing up courage to propose."

"I knew nothing of that," said the Rev. David mildly.

"You should have guessed," said George, somewhat unreasonably. "I think at least you owe her an apology."

"I intend to offer her my sincerest apologies on the first opportunity."

George grunted. "Well, anyway——"

"Haven't you said enough about it, George?"

"Enough? I haven't begun yet."

"I am sorry to hear that," said the Rev. David, "because if you say much more I'll punch you on the nose. It's more than seven years," said the Rev. David reflectively, "since I punched you on the nose; but I think I could manage it again." He smiled slightly. "Let us hope it will not be necessary."

"Are you threatening me?" said George.

"Yes," said the Rev. David. "What are you going to do about it?"

George grinned. "I'll shut up. But I think you owe me something for the dirty trick you played me when you wrote that letter."

"If ever Miss Harrington and I become friends," said the Rev. David, "I shall certainly plead your cause. But just at present the possibility seems remote."

"And a jolly good job," said George ungratefully. "You've done enough harm already."

They moved towards the house, skirting the ornamental pond where lilies floated waxen-white and beautiful, and fat fish drowsed with slowly-waving fins, like stout financial magnates at a *matinée*. Near its

end, crossing by a narrow, steep-arched bridge, the Rev. David halted to glance upwards at a balcony jutting from the house.

"The lady of the castle still feeds the fish from there, eh, George?"

"If the fish depended on the ladies for their grub," said George, "they'd turn cannibal."

Denise and Comrade Wuthers strolled into view from the direction of the beach.

"A charming girl," said the Rev. David approvingly.

"I wish I'd never thought so."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I say I wish I'd never thought her charming."

"I don't quite follow you, George."

"It's this way," said George. "Confidentially, of course. Not so long ago I had a bit of a pash on Miss Brooks. As a matter of fact, I proposed to her several times. In writing. Now I'm a bit keen on Miss Harrington, and I'm afraid those letters might prove awkward."

"I don't see why they should," said the Rev. David. "In the hands of an unscrupulous girl, yes; but not in the hands of Miss Brooks. Ask her to return them."

"Wouldn't that be rather insulting?"

"Ummmm!"

"You see, it's not so simple, really. But forget it. I don't want it spread around."

"You may rely on my discretion," said the Rev. David. "And on my help if opportunity occurs."

"Keep out of this," said George hastily. "You've always been my jinx, and it looks as if you are still. Amuse yourself any way you like; but don't interfere in this. Keep your nose," said George vulgarly, "out of my business. Keep off the grass. Go down to the village and convert a few sinners, or start a glee club, but leave me and my love-affairs alone, or I'll have a couple of breach of promise cases on my hands."

"You excite yourself unduly," said the Rev. David. George looked dubious.

2

"Mr. Selwyn," Joan said.

The Rev. David came to his feet like the unpopular schoolmaster who has sat down on a bent pin. He might have known, he reflected in that split second, the truce of the morning had been too good to last. Now, while he drowsed peacefully after a hearty lunch, Nemesis had tracked him to his sylvan retreat, and studied him with accusing grey eyes. The Rev. David had considered himself safe in this secluded glade; but seemingly he was out of luck. He came to his feet with the agility of a trained flea, stammered, and blushed. A little flicker of laughter came and went in Joan's grave eyes, a flicker far too subtle for his fuddled perceptions.

"Mr. Selwyn," Joan said, "you want to talk to me, don't you?"

There was nothing the Rev. David wanted less; but he lacked the courage to say no. He, who had quelled with a glance savage chiefs bent on having him served with the roast buck and the fried locusts for supper, quailed before the faintly reproachful gaze of a slim and lovely young lady in white. With six feet of ebon brawn and muscle the Rev. David would have known how to deal; but with the five-foot-three of dainty slenderness now before him he was, so to speak, like the cockle-man when the tide was in. An extremely embarrassing position.

"It's nice and quiet here," Joan said. "There's no fear of anyone interrupting us." She settled herself on the primrose-spotted bank vacated by the Rev. David, and twitched her skirt down over her knees, an action so instinctive and unaffectedly modest that the Rev. David blushed to find himself an interested witness of it. Then she patted the bank beside her. "Sit down, please. I'm not so savage as I look."

The Rev. David, still tongue-tied, sat down a good three feet from her.

Joan observed him with a kindly smile. Her first rancour had long ago worn off, foreign as it was in a nature essentially sweet; but she was as determined as ever to see that letter.

"You wished to tell me something, Mr. Selwyn?" she said encouragingly.

"Yes," said the Rev. David. "Yes. Er . . . yes."

"You make yourself very clear," said Joan.

The Rev. David shot a brief glance at her, and mentally pulled up his socks.

"Miss Harrington," he said earnestly, "I wish to apologize for that letter. Without trying to exculpate myself, I must confess that it was written in a moment of lunacy. When I went to Africa seven years ago I had never seen a musical comedy. *Who Says So?* was . . . startling. You were the starring actress, so I mentioned your name. You must believe me when I tell you that nothing was further from my thoughts than any objectionable personality, or any reflection on your character. And I am grateful to you for giving me this opportunity of saying how sorry I am, how really sorry, that I should have acted in so unpardonable a manner."

Joan looked down at the toes of her shoes. She wanted to tell the Rev. David that everything was quite all right, that she understood perfectly, and that his apology had removed her last faint shadow of resentment. He had spoken with admirable humility and frankness, and there could be no doubt as to his sincerity. Joan's impulse was to be sweetly generous and forgiving; yet she repressed it.

"I'll forgive you on one condition," she said.

"Which is?" said the Rev. David eagerly.

"That you let me see the letter itself."

The Rev. David gulped. "Oh, but——"

"You've destroyed it?" said Joan.

"No; but I feel . . . I believe . . ." He wiped

his perspiring brow. "To tell you the truth, Miss Harrington, the paper let me down lightly, very lightly. You see, I'm being honest with you. If you read that letter, you'd never speak to me again."

"I see," Joan said coldly. "In that case, Mr. Selwyn, I find I can't forgive you."

The Rev. David looked wretched.

"Unless you reconsider your decision?"

The Rev. David looked more wretched than ever. He was having an unhappy quarter-hour of it. The world was a rotten hole.

"You don't?" said Joan. "Well, you know best." She stood up, swinging her big hat by the ribbons. "But there's no need to be so miserable about it, is there? Do you swim, Mr. Selwyn?"

"Swim?" said the Rev. David. "Yes . . . er . . . yes. Yes."

"I gather that you do," said Joan. "So do I. It's a beautiful afternoon for a swim."

The Rev. David wondered what she was driving at.

"I hate swimming by myself," said Joan.

"Yes," said the Rev. David.

"Can't you see," said Joan patiently, "I want you to ask me to go swimming with you?"

"Oh!" said the Rev. David. "Certainly, Miss Harrington!" Then he smiled, shyly. "You don't altogether hate me, I hope?"

"Not at all," said Joan. "But I hate your ideas. You should have taken a cabin on the *Mayflower*."

When *Who Says So?* shocked you, I hesitate to think what you'd have done if you'd seen *Three Nights*. But if you want to go through life looking for a second and bad meaning in everything, that's your own affair. So long as you don't find faults in me that I haven't got, and say nothing about those I have got, I don't particularly mind. Now we understand each other, don't we?" She smiled suddenly, and the sunshine came back into the Rev. David's sky, and once again he heard the birds sing.

"I don't go through life looking for a second meaning in things," he said boyishly. "Really I don't."

"That's all right," said Joan. "I didn't honestly think you did. Now run up to the house and get your togs, and we'll have that swim. Don't be long."

"Could I get anything of yours?"

"You'll get my goat unless you hurry."

"Oh! Ah!" said the Rev. David. Turning, he galloped off in the direction of the house.

No sooner had he gone than Tony appeared from behind a clump of bushes some fifty yards away.

"He does not yield?"

"Not an inch," said Joan.

"Ha!" said Tony. "The last of the Waynes is glad. He bows before the lion heart of the intrepid missionary. Anon he will do his stuff."

"Run away, Tony!" Joan commanded, glancing anxiously towards the house. "He'll be back in a minute. Eat it!"

"I am gone," said Tony, going.

The Rev. David returned presently, a bathing costume and a towel over one arm. He seemed relieved to find Joan where he had left her.

"I should have asked you to bring me a towel, Mr. Selwyn," she said.

"A towel, Miss Harrington? You can have this, of course." He looked at her.

"You're wondering if I'll want your costume as well," said Joan. "Calm yourself. My own is on already, you see."

The Rev. David didn't see; but he felt it might be indelicate to say so.

They strolled towards the cliffs. On the open space above the grassy slopes they paused a moment to look at the blue sea, then went slowly down the winding path to the beach. Here the ripples whispered on the shingle, and the gulls wheeled tirelessly and as tirelessly complained.

"I'll undress over there," Joan said, pointing to a huddle of rocks at the base of the cliff. "The rest of the beach is yours. Don't be long."

The Rev. David went a hundred yards up the beach, and commenced to disrobe between two boulders that promised him completest privacy. He was but half-finished when Joan, slender and graceful in a green silk costume, ran down to the sea. Where it was a few inches deep she sat down, waiting for him. He trotted out, buttoning his shoulder-strap.

"You men wear too many clothes," she said, wading towards the deep water. "Ooooh! It's cold!" She plunged, and began to crawl, her arms nicely straight, her heels just rippling the surface. The Rev David, with his antiquated trudge, found some difficulty in keeping level with her.

"You're some swimmer!" he gasped, when, about two hundred yards out, Joan treaded water.

"We actresses must keep in good condition," she said demurely.

He laughed a little ruefully. "Will you never forget that letter?"

"Never. I'd be so nice to you, if only you'd let me see it."

He shook his head. "I can't believe that."

"Couldn't you take my word for it?"

"I'd like to . . ." he said slowly, staring towards the beach. There a bearded tramp of indescribably villainous appearance strolled with the easy grace of one born to the great open spaces, glancing about him in a manner that proclaimed the world to be his oyster.

"What's the matter?" said Joan. "Got a cramp?"

"Wonder what that fellow's looking for?" the Rev. David said uneasily. "I hope he doesn't interfere with your clothes, Miss Harrington."

"They'd be no use to him," said Joan lightly. "Seems to me he's making for yours."

It became only too apparent that she was right. Deviating from his path, the tramp turned to the

boulders between which lay the missionary's discarded garments. In another moment he was picking them up. The Rev. David saw his shirt fluttering in the breeze.

"Hey!" the Rev. David roared. "Hey, there!" A wave filled his mouth, and he spluttered an instant. "HEY, you!"

The tramp turned, swept off his battered hat, bowed, and resumed his collection. His was the great calm of the man who knows himself beyond reach of the law.

Muttering something that must sorely have taxed his conscience at a later date, the Rev. David struck out for the beach, Joan at his heels. He was of the type that converts the heathen with a Bible in one hand and a sjambok in the other. His intentions with regard to this tramp were of a more physical than spiritual description; but at the same time he was determined that, in the immediate future at least, the tramp would steal no more. In short, he meant to give the tramp the beating of his life.

The tramp did not wait. Neither did he hurry. He gathered the clothes into a neat bundle, took this under one arm, and made at a leisurely pace for the path. He was half-way to the top of the cliff when the Rev. David, bounding through the shallows like a young and playful spaniel, gained the beach. Glancing down, he waved.

Then it was that the Rev. David showed the stuff

not even seven years as a missionary could debase. He went up the path as if an all-seeing Providence had on the spur of the moment equipped him with wings.

Tony had not expected this. But he was not dismayed. Clad as he was, the Rev. David would not venture far lest he outrage the modesty of some strolling maiden. So Tony reasoned.

Such reasoning was faulty. The Rev. David, just then, had no thought for modesty, whether his own or another's. He might never have heard of it. He would have followed that tramp into Westminster Abbey in the middle of a service, and considered himself insulted had he been asked to leave, however politely. As he bounded up the path, he swore strange oaths in Bomongo and Swahili, with now and then a dash of virulent Taal adding ginger to the mixture. Selwyn the man—and a man whose clothes were being stolen—had ousted Selwyn the cleric.

Tony, reaching the top of the cliffs, made for the woods in search of some quiet place where he could at leisure go through the Rev. David's pockets. The abrupt appearance of the Rev. David himself, when he was little more than midway to the trees, surprised and slightly annoyed him. He felt that the Rev. David was taking this affair altogether too much to heart. Tony admitted it wasn't every day a man's clothes were stolen; but that was due to the efficiency of the police rather than to any moral rectitude on the part of those likely to steal clothes. He thought the Rev. David

should realize this, and not be so greatly put out when for once the police failed. But, logical or not, there it was, and there was the Rev. David, savage of mien and quite obviously hankering for trouble. Tony ran.

The Rev. David gave chase. The extreme lightness of his clothing lent him, temporarily, the fleetness of wings. Until Tony, reaching the trees, ran through the thickest undergrowth in sight, hoping the thorny brambles, by tearing the skin from his legs, would prove to the Rev. David the futility of his pursuit.

Such scratches as he suffered, however, served only further to enrage the already maddened man, so much so that he bellowed threats little suited to his calling, and which might have been taken for an eye-witness's account of what befell the gladiator who misjudged the lion's spring.

Tony heeded him not. He, who had humbled the pride of Cambridge's best, found no difficulty in keeping several jumps ahead of the Rev. David, earnest as were that gentleman's efforts to reduce to a minimum the distance between them.

So they ran through the quiet woods, startling birds and squirrels, leaving behind them a trail of awful threats and full-blooded Bomongo oaths, until they saw the road.

Tony hadn't known the road was so near. He reached it with a sense of gratitude. Wearing two coats and two pairs of trousers, and with a handkerchief about his throat and a false beard on his face,

he found the afternoon rather warm for sustained strenuous exercise. Here, he told himself, the Rev. David would surely give ear to the claims of modesty, and draw back blushing into the friendly shelter of the trees.

The Rev. David seemed unaware of his obligations. He, too, gained the road with a sense of gratitude. Here were no brambles to restrain him. He tucked his elbows in, threw his chest out and his head back, and started after Tony with all the inflexible determination of the bookie leaving the field where his debts are more than he can honourably meet. Only to see his quarry glance back, lengthen his stride, and vanish around a corner at so astonishing a speed that the Rev. David immediately realized the futility of further pursuit.

"Damn!" he said, slowing to a walk. "Oh, curse it. *S'glom! Oojai patootil!*"

Tony, rounding the corner, ran almost full tilt into a stout figure in blue, avoiding collision only by an agile bound to one side.

P.C. Blodgett was out for his afternoon stroll. Previous to Tony's advent, he viewed the world with the serene and benevolent eye of a contented cow. P.C. Blodgett's job was a sinecure, though to have told him so would have left him hazy and dubious, and perhaps indignant. But he would readily have agreed that his district was remarkably free from crime.

P.C. Blodgett now saw a tramp running. That

alone was enough to make him suspicious. More than enough was the bundle of clothes under Tony's arm.

"'Ere!" said P.C. Blodgett. Some men can make that simple word as arresting as a barbed wire fence. P.C. Blodgett was of these. But Tony halted not.

"'Ere!" roared the minion of the law. "I want you!"

"We can't always have what we want," said Tony back over one shoulder. "This world is far from perfect."

P.C. Blodgett hitched at his belt and started in pursuit. He went but a short distance, then halted, fuming. Tony disappeared at a rapid lope somehow reminiscent of a jack-rabbit heading for home in the small hours.

"Dang 'im!" said P.C. Blodgett. "Dang 'is dirty 'ide!" He turned to retrace his steps, dabbing at his heated brow with a handkerchief of violent hue, and there before him was a young man in bathing-costume. The Rev. David had decided to follow on at a trot. P.C. Blodgett thought a young man in bathing-costume on a public road was something against the law.

"Wot's all this?" he demanded. "An' 'oo might you be?"

"I might be Julius Cæsar," said the Rev. David, "but as a matter of historical fact I'm not. Why didn't you stop that man?"

"Why didn't I stop that man?" P.C. Blodgett echoed

indignantly. "Because I ain't no Derby winner, that's why."

"No, you ain't," the Rev. David agreed nastily, eyeing with disfavour P.C. Blodgett's rotundity.

"Anyway, you come erlong wi' me. You ain't got no right to be on the public 'ighway in that there state."

"Eh?" said the Rev. David. "You mean you're pulling me?"

"Yus," said the man in blue tersely.

"Like hell you are!" said the Rev. David, again abandoning himself to sin. He dodged past a blue arm, and made for the gates of Hawkscliff, P.C. Blodgett, bellowing incoherently, hot on his trail. They swung from the road to the avenue, and the Rev. David took to the woods. P.C. Blodgett stuck to him with the tenacity of a half-chewed lump of toffee ejected by a child in a crowded lift. P.C. Blodgett meant to get his man.

The Rev. David was lost to all sense of decency; his one desire was to lie in a cold bath and curse, free from petty annoyances. Beyond that his vision did not go. He was, just then, a man of single purpose.

So they came to the lawns, and into the midst of a party of ladies and gentlemen at their ease in canvas chairs. All started up, and some of the ladies screamed faintly and put their hands to their eyes, presumably to shade them from the sun. Above all rose the cry of the Rev. David's aunt, of horror and reproof and

pity inextricably tangled, like the bellow of a mother hippopotamus separated from her young.

"*Dave!*" Mrs. Trent swept forward. The Rev. David halted.

"Got you!" said P.C. Blodgett. The hand of the law descended on the Rev. David's shoulder.

"What's all this, Blodgett?" George demanded. "What's the trouble, man?"

"Can't 'ave the gentleman runnin' nood on the public 'ighway, sir."

"But he's not," said George. "And he's not on the public highway."

"Maybe 'e ain't altogether nood, sir," said P.C. Blodgett, a man entirely without tact. "But on the public 'ighway 'e were, as I'm ready to take hoath."

"Pooh, pooh!" said George, taking the stout constable by the arm. "He's my cousin, Blodgett; you should remember him. Come over here and we'll talk business."

With a slight smile, P.C. Blodgett released the Rev. David and moved a little distance aside. George had a persuasive way about him. Also he had one hand in his pocket. Coin of the realm was in active circulation. The worthy constable succumbed to logic.

"But it mustn't 'appen again, sir," he warned the Rev. David.

"Oh, go boil your fat head!" said the Rev. David.

There was a moment's hushed silence, such as might

—or might not—have settled on Pompeii when the citizens realized that they were to be buried alive in boiling lava and red-hot ashes. Wrath clouded the lordly brow of P.C. Blodgett as smoke had darkened the crest of Vesuvius. He rumbled even as the mountain had rumbled. He had been bribed; but there was a limit to what flesh and blood could stand. All present, with the exception of the Rev. David himself, held their breath.

“Ho!” said P.C. Blodgett.

“Ho, yourself!” said the Rev. David.

“Here’s Tony,” somebody said quickly, and the tension was relieved.

Tony came from the trees with a dreamy smile and the Rev. David’s clothes. He had removed his disguise, and was his usual immaculate self.

“Met a tramp chappie on the road,” he said easily. “I thought I recognized your toggery, Selwyn, so I put it to him as man to man, and, if you will permit me the colloquialism, he skipped the gutter. Conscience,” said Tony, “doth make cowards of us all. Also the fact that I threatened to beat his face in may have had something to do with it.” With a flourish, he delivered the clothes to their owner, who thanked him in a few brief words. “*Noblesse oblige*,” said Tony. “*Noblesse oblige*.”

“As for you,” the Rev. David said, turning to P.C. Blodgett, “if you were anything but a half-boiled slab of beef in a blue uniform, with a lump of wood for

a head, you'd have caught that tramp. You're only a——"

"*Davie!*" Mrs. Trent wailed.

"Oh, *s'glom!*" said the Rev. David. He strode morosely towards the house.

"A painful scene," said Tony; but he said it to himself.

3

"Miss Brooks," Tony said, "may I call you Denise?"

They were on the terrace; dinner was over. The nightingales were tuning in; the moon was rising in still, pale beauty, like, as Tony remarked, a cold poached egg on a plate.

Denise turned to him, and smiled. She was in tender mood. A good dinner can have that effect on even the most ethereal of mortals.

"If you think it'll help you through life," she said.

"It will," said Tony earnestly. "It will. In later years I shall look back on this moment as on the one bright light in my darkness, the one oasis in the desert of a wasted life, and tell myself, sadly but reverently, that then for the first time the beautiful name passed my lips. Denise!" He sighed. "Denise!"

Denise laughed. "Tony, you're a flirt."

"You wrong me!" he protested, somewhat startled.

"I saw you making goo-goo eyes at Joan all through dinner."

"One must do something to help the fun along."

The lady on my right would tell me all about a Back to the Land movement she had in mind, while the lady on my left insisted on giving me her solution of the servant problem. Under which circumstances," said Tony, "it was no very heinous crime to make goo-goo eyes at Joan."

"No," Denise admitted. "But then, I saw you making them at Lady Pat last night."

"One must do one's best to help along the party. We Waynes never shirk a duty. That," said Tony, "is why we are to-day what we are to-day."

"And what are you to-day?"

"Dying out," said Tony, with gloom. "Dying out."

"But how can you be?" said Denise. "There's no reason why you shouldn't marry, is there?"

"Yes."

"Yes?"

"I can't get anyone to marry."

"You can't have tried very hard."

"You flatter me."

"I don't; I flatter your bank-account."

"A mercenary view," said Tony. "But you are right; I have not tried very hard. Doubtless there are girls who have not said me nay; but," said Tony, "probably that is because I have not given them the chance."

"Cheer up!" said Denise. "Somewhere, there's a girl waiting for every man."

"With a sandbag," said Tony. He brooded a

moment. "For almost four years I've dodged girls whose one desire was to add me to the home; yet now that I want to marry they give me the eye of a frozen hake. They look on me as something left on the doorstep by the cat. It's discouraging," said Tony, "to be treated as a half-wit. One almost resents it. I suppose you'd treat me that way if I asked you to marry me?"

"Not if you asked me very nicely," said Denise. "I'd just say no without being insulting."

"Which comes to much the same," said Tony. "Like choking a starving man with caviare."

"Are you seriously asking me to marry you?"

"I've never been so serious before."

"But you know absolutely nothing about me!"

"Something tells me we are soul-mates," said Tony.

"It forgot to tell me at the same time," said Denise. She stood up. "Lady Pat promised to show me some photos. You'll excuse me."

"You're not angry, I hope?" Tony said, taking her hand.

"Angry? No; just . . . disappointed. I didn't think men proposed so lightly. Not men like you." She stood very straight and slender, her gaze level, almost accusing. She seemed ready to say more, but instead looked down at the hand he held. It lay still in his grasp, a little thing, soft and warm. "Please."

Tony bent quickly, and kissed the slim fingers. "That's an apology, Denise."

She nodded, and went in.

Tony sat down again. He wondered why Denise's mood had changed so suddenly. Girls were queer. And he wondered why he'd kissed her hand. Certainly he hadn't contemplated it.

Joan appeared from the house, glanced around, came and sat beside him.

"Get it, Tony?"

Tony shook his head. "No. He must keep it in his room."

"Well," said Joan cheerfully, "you've plenty of time yet. Don't despair. Remember Bruce and the spider. And think of the reward."

"No payment in advance?" said Tony.

"No," said Joan firmly. "Terms strictly cash."

Just about that time the Rev. David found himself the victim of an unfortunate chain of circumstances. Having retired to his room after dinner to soothe his nerves with a smoke and a read of something light while not essentially frivolous, and after a while finding his condition vastly improved, he moved into the corridor with some vague idea of playing himself a hundred up at billiards.

On his way he passed, or should have passed, Denise's room. The door was open. Moonlight flooded the room, touching everything with gold. The Rev. David halted. His glance fastened upon a photograph on the dressing-table, the photograph of a laughing girl in the dress of a ballet-dancer. It was

a photograph of herself, taken early in her stage career, that Joan had given Denise.

The Rev. David looked about in the stealthy manner of a dog in a strange neighbourhood. He was alone. One step he went forward, then another and another, entering the room even while he shuddered at the enormity of his crime. Picking up the photograph, he gazed on it with conflicting emotions, while time stood still. The moonlight brought colour to the laughing face, life to the slender figure.

How long he stood there he could not have said. The sound of voices in the corridor, piercing to his inner consciousness, awakened him to realization of his danger.

He sprang to the door, only to draw back quickly. He was trapped; they were already close enough to see him if he emerged. He heard Denise and Lady Pat. As he stood helpless, they halted a few yards away, a door opened, and a sudden flood of light illuminated the corridor. Lady Pat was about to show Denise her collection of snaps.

The Rev. David, stilling his breath, peered out like a wolverine from its lair. The door of Lady Pat's room was open, and through it he saw the two girls. Both faced his way. He drew back. To leave the room now was to be detected. He glanced around, and hope leaped in him at sight of the balcony. Moving quickly across, he pushed open the french-windows,

and an instant later gazed down on the placid waters of the ornamental lake.

There are moments too pregnant for ordinary words. The Rev. David did not use ordinary words. Even the whisper in which discretion forced him to relieve himself failed to make them anything but extraordinary.

After a while he ceased to whisper to the quiet night, and thought things over. If he remained where he was until Denise and Lady Pat went downstairs again, everything would be lovely. He drew the heavy curtains across the window, and from behind them watched the glow of Lady Pat's door. The girls still talked. A horrible thought flashed through his mind—that that was all girls ever did.

Time passed. The Rev. David listened to the nightingales and Lady Pat's soft voice. He saw Tony and Joan move into the house from the terrace below. That made him glance at his watch. He shied like the man who finds he is overdrawn at the bank. The house was very quiet. . . . He heard Denise say good night to Lady Pat. The full horror of his position burst on him as Denise switched on the lights and shut her door.

He who hesitates is lost. The Rev. David hesitated. He should at once have parted the curtains and explained simply and naturally just what brought him there. He heard Denise cross the room and halt before the dressing-table. Then he heard the slightest of

rustles, and knew that his chance was gone. The gentle thud of two shoes taken off and dropped carelessly came to him. More rustling followed, and a frank yawn. Then Denise brushed her hair. The Rev. David heard whispering. Denise still said her prayers aloud. After that, she opened the door an inch or two, and called "Bill" softly. Bill did not come, and she returned. The bed creaked. The lights clicked off.

The Rev. David, crouched there like some griffin played with by the moonlight, wondered if, when Denise was asleep, he could creep unheard through the room and into the corridor. But he shuddered at the thought of what discovery would mean. Screams and accusations, and endless explanations and suspicions. . . .

"S'glom!" said the Rev. David very softly. He hung by his hands from the balcony, and dropped. The water of the lake was just deep enough to break the force of his fall. He waded waist-deep towards the side.

A window opened, and a head was thrust forth into the night. A second window opened, and a third and fourth.

"By gum!" said Mr. Trent. "It's Dave having a paddle."

"Dave!" cried Mrs. Trent. "Whatever are you doing?"

"Friend Selwyn," said Tony, "hopes to swim the

Channel, and seizes this opportunity to indulge in a little light training. Let us wish him luck, and admire him for his boyish enthusiasm. He is typical of our best type of young British athlete."

"He might have some consideration for the poor fish," said Lady Pat sleepily.

"Which poor fish?" said Tony. "There's more than one of us here."

"Mr. Selwyn," Denise said, "if you see Bill anywhere around, will you please bring him in?"

The Rev. David clambered from the pool in dignified silence, and stalked towards the door.

"Maybe he's walking in his sleep," said Mr. Trent. "Hey, Dave! Are you asleep?"

"Oh, go to Jericho!" said his nephew in a repressed voice.

"He's awake all right," said Mr. Trent. "If he was asleep he'd have advised me to go somewhere else."

"Dave, dear," Mrs. Trent called anxiously, "are you feeling ill, or anything?"

"No, thanks, Auntie," said the Rev. David in the quiet tone of one who knows that nothing worse can happen now. "I'm perfectly all right." He rang the bell, and after a few moments the door was opened. He vanished. One by one the heads followed suit, until at length only Denise's and Tony's remained.

"Hello, Denise."

"Hello, Tony."

"Angry?"

"No. . . ."

"You know, I'm sorry. . . ."

"That's all right, Tony."

"See you in the morning?"

"It's probable."

"Sweet dreams."

"May your dreams be so wonderful that you cry when you wake up."

"They will be," said Tony, "if I dream of you."

"Yes; the reality is always disappointing, isn't it? Cheerio." She waved a little hand.

"I wonder?" Tony murmured, slipping between the sheets. "Denise, or Joan, or Lady Pat?"

Hawkscliff slept.

Not for long. Uproar arose in what realists would describe as the bowels of the house. Men and women bounded to the floor and their doors in every variety of indignation and panic and nightwear. Voices, querulous, timid, and frankly blasphemous, inquired as to the matter. The men pounded downstairs, knocked against each other in the dark, and swore. Somebody struck a match, and conducted a search for the electric-light switch.

The lights suddenly flashed on, to reveal George with a shot-gun and lemon-and-black pyjamas, at sight of which sartorial horrors, so tense were the emotions prevalent, nobody even blinked. The stairs were crowded with ladies in dressing-gowns and the younger spirits frankly and unashamedly in pyjamas, unwilling

to miss a moment of the fun for the sake of propriety. The uproar had stilled, and a dreadful hush descended on the hall. Through it cut the voice of Mr. Trent.

"I suppose it's Dave doing his Swedish drill."

"*Hush!*" said somebody.

A sound came from the back of the hall. A slight sound, as of slowly-dragging feet. George advanced his shot-gun, peering into the gloom beside the stairs, an Englishman in defence of his home.

A ghostly figure appeared, a dim, white monster gambolling about its feet. Together, they advanced into the light. It was Gregg, the butler, in a long white nightshirt and carpet slippers. Even thus his dignity had not deserted him. Level with his chest, held at full arms' length, he carried something beneath which Bill the Bulldog cavorted joyously.

"Gregg," George cried, breaking the hushed silence, "what the deuce is that?"

"Tibbins, sir," Gregg said solemnly. "The house cat, sir. De-ceased."

CHAPTER FOUR

I

A THRUSH in the ivy under Denise's window saluted the morning with a burst of song preparatory to making a pass at the early worm, and Denise, turning over, yawned. She had a vague idea that it was Monday morning, and time for her to be on her way to Trent's Mammoth Store; but this soon passed as one by one the incidents of the previous night came back to her. The mystery of the Rev. David's immersion in the ornamental lake. . . . The tragedy of Tibbins, cornered in the hall by Bill. . . . Tony's proposal and subsequent apology.

Tony. . . . Denise thought about Tony, staring with sleepy blue eyes at the ceiling. She liked his thin, brown face, his lazy smile, his quizzical eyes. But she didn't like his habit of making love in that peculiar comic-opera manner on every opportunity. It didn't seem natural to her. And it wasn't right. Denise thought that when a man made love, at least seriously enough to propose, he should mean every word he said, and a few he couldn't remember.

With Denise, flirting was one thing, and making love another. If a man came to her with the offer of his name she would turn from him in disgust unless

he laid his heart at her feet and shrank from the prospect of her shaken head. Tony's proposal, she somehow knew, had had nothing to do with his heart, and by refusing she had hurt him not at all. It was as if he hadn't been in earnest, and had treated the whole thing as a joke.

Then, his apology. That had been sincere. Denise stirred a little, and smiled. Yes, that had been sincere. But it puzzled her. He had been sincere in his apology for his insincerity in proposing. That seemed illogical. Surely the proposal was the more important of the two. She wondered if he would have shown any elation had she accepted him. But that, she told herself, was idle speculation. The point was that his apology had left her thinking him a pleasant young man. Without it, she would have thought him something vastly different. Well . . .

The thrush had gone to look for breakfast. Denise drifted back to sleep.

She went downstairs a few hours later, and out into the park for a stroll. On the terrace Tony overtook her, and fell in by her side.

"You and I, Denise," he said, taking her arm, "are up with the lark while the sluggards still lie abed. That raucous noise you hear in the middle distance is George singing in his bath. Friend Selwyn still dreams of Utopias where there are no Joans, and Comrade Wuthers of the Millennium when Capital and Labour shall change places. Sprigg snores in blank

verse. Only you and I are out in God's kind sunshine, listening to the birds and watching the flowers open their faces to the sky."

"And I'm watching you open your face to the sky," said Denise severely. "Can't you be quiet, and drink it all in?"

"Unkind, unkind!" said Tony. "I trust you slept well?"

"As well as could be expected. Tony, do you think Mr. Selwyn is a little weak in the attic?"

"You mean to ask me," said Tony, "do I consider him nuts, or, as you might put it, bugs or cuckoo?"

"Something like that," Denise admitted. "Has he slipped? Is he phooey? Is he ossified from the ears up?"

"It is hard to say." Tony deliberated a moment. "At times he seems normal enough—at meals, for example. But this eagerness to take his bath fully clothed in a fish-pond at dead of night seems to indicate some lapse from the strictly conventional. Let us be charitable, and class him as eccentric. Tastes differ in baths as in everything else. We have," said Tony, "the classical example of Cleopatra (or was it Cleopatra?) who bathed twice a day in asses' milk. Again, we have Achilles, who thought the Styx a fair enough swimming-pool. History tells us that one of our royal Richards took a fatal plunge in a butt of Malmsey.

"So," said Tony, "friend Selwyn's case is not so

startling as might at first appear. Unconventional, yes, in these prim days; but hardly affording grounds for his incarceration in a home. No. Hardly."

"But can you explain what he was doing in the lake when everybody else was in bed?"

"There," Tony admitted, "you have me. But doubtless he had some sound reason. Perhaps he belongs to a secret society of which this is one of the rites. Or he may have dropped a coin into the lake during the day, and been ashamed to dive for it at the time, while reluctant to admit it lost. His ancestors come from beyond the Border, I believe. Again, he may have had some thought of observing the nocturnal habits of the fish. There are," said Tony, "a thousand-and-one explanations which occur to the charitable mind."

"Then mine can't be charitable," said Denise. "But there's Lady Pat; let's go in. Mrs. Trent has some announcement to make this morning, hasn't she?"

"She has," said Tony, with gloom.

Denise gave him a level glance of her blue eyes. "What's it going to be, Tony?"

"Heaven knows. A month earlier, it might be a Maypole. Even now it might be rustic dances on the green, the dancers tastefully garbed in smocks and a fixed grin. Or even community singing. Then there is nothing," said Tony, "to assure us that we are not threatened with a form of rural slumming, a sport to which our hostess is addicted.

"All I can say with any certainty is that our worst fears will be more than realized, with the best intentions in the world on the part of George's mother. The hand that rocks the cradle," said Tony, "should now and then be reminded that the equivalent of a rhythmic motion from side to side seldom meets with an adult's conception of bliss. What satisfied George a quarter of a century ago will not satisfy him now. Nor will it soothe his guests."

"You're not very cheering," said Denise. They went inside with Lady Pat, to find the breakfast-room full.

Mrs. Trent made her announcement after breakfast. Tony said it approached pretty closely his conception of a reading of the Budget.

"Every hostess," Mrs. Trent began, "is always looking for something new to entertain her guests. That's her duty and her pleasure."

"Hear, hear!" said the men gruffly.

"What the mater is trying to say," said George, "is that you're not to blame her for what she's going to spring on you. It's her sacred duty."

"Shut up, George," said Mrs. Trent. "And please kick your father on the shins; he's distracting Colonel Campbell. Now, are you all ready? I was reading a book the other day. It was all about some people who went down the South Seas in a yacht, and were wrecked on a coral island. Then the crew went savage, and all the nice people lived apart from them, although that meant cooking their own food, and that

sort of thing. But they found it great fun, and were sorry when a ship came along to take them off. There was more plot to it than that, of course, and a lot of love-making under the moon and the palms; but that has nothing to do with us. What I want you to remember is that these people had a great old time on the island, living like gipsies, in huts made of leaves.

"Well," said Mrs. Trent, "we haven't a yacht; but we have a cabin cruiser. And we're not in the South Seas; but we have an island two miles out. George says he won't wreck the launch; but we could get along without an actual wreck, couldn't we? So if you approve of the idea, we'll live on Hawkscliff Island for a few days at least. Not in huts made of leaves, but in tents. Otherwise everything will be the same, except that we won't have a savage crew to guard against. We'll do our own cooking, and that sort of thing; and if any of the men want a round of golf they can come over in the launch in a few minutes. There's an old haunted castle on the island, and buried treasure, and splendid coves for swimming, so there should be plenty to do. Now what do you think of it, please? I want you to be candid. If you'd prefer to stay here, here we stay. If you're ready to rough it a bit, then it's yo-ho for Hawkscliff Island."

"I wanted the mater to have a few wild pigs let loose," George said, "so that we could kill and cure our own bacon; but she didn't seem enthusiastic."

"You're all very quiet," said Mrs. Trent. "Don't

you like it? I want you to say what you think, you know. Tony, you're painfully candid sometimes. What's the good word?"

"My silence," said Tony, "has been the silence of stupefied admiration. Ever since I could read, my one ambition has been to find myself cast away on a desert island. You, Mrs. Trent, have made my dreams come true."

"If only I could be sure you were serious. . . ."

"I am; I am! I am as serious," said Tony, "as a Scotsman making his will, or as a man contemplating bigamy. The prospect of cooking my own food makes me water at the mouth, while that of washing my dishes gives me the same thrill as sitting down on a tin-tack. Mrs. Trent," said Tony earnestly, "you have given me back my youth. I am sure all present will agree with me when I say your idea marks an epoch in the history of hospitality."

"There's something very ambiguous about that," Mrs. Trent said doubtfully. "Your sentences are so long and involved that I never quite know whether you're being complimentary or giving me a sly dig."

Tony bowed. "The idea is worthy of friend Mussolini."

"It's a great scheme," said Joan.

"Splendid," said Denise loyally.

"Thrilling," said Lady Pat. "So romantic." She looked at Tony.

"All in favour, hands up," Mrs. Trent said.

All hands went up. Mrs. Trent beamed.

"We'll try it for a few days, then, anyway. Everybody bring their oldest clothes and their bathing togs. We'll leave after lunch. Tony, I believe you turned the scale for me."

"I have in me," said Tony, "a streak of romance inherited from an ancestor married at Gretna Green. The principal reason for which," said Tony, "being that he was a costermonger there."

2

Tony came down the cliff like a principal boy of a pantomime coming down the stage, with a girl on each arm. On his right was Joan, and on his left was Lady Pat. Could anything be better than that, Tony asked? Unless he had a few more arms, he didn't see how it could. He'd have liked a third for Denise; but he didn't say so.

In front, George tramped along like Alexander Selkirk on a tour around his island. Behind came Denise with the Rev. David, and behind them tramped the remaining adventurers. Some carried raincoats; some trusted to the weather and Mrs. Trent, and brought no more than they stood up in, their nightwear and their toothbrushes. It had been adjudged wiser to leave Bill the Bulldog behind.

Mr. Trent brandished aloft his butterfly-net. Not even now could he be parted from this, the only spot

of sunshine in the gloom of the expedition. Mr. Trent was privately of the opinion that the strain of playing hostess had been a little too much for his wife. But he knew his place. It had been shown him on many a well-fought field.

The expedition headed towards the stage where George's cruiser floated. She was a long, white boat, with a raised deck-house stretching from near the bow to well past the middle. Two petrol engines of 250 horse-power each gave her a speed of thirty miles an hour. George, egged on by his mother, had christened her the *Rose*. His own ideas had run to something more frivolous.

"Stow yourselves anywhere," George said, leading the way aboard. "Tony, loose off that rope there, will you?"

"You want me to cast off?" said Tony. "The old nautical slang needs a little polishing up, George."

"I'm captain aboard this boat," George said with what Mr. Bramah's Kai Lung might describe as a look of no pleasure. "If you want nautical slang, grab an earful. Stow the gab, you lubber, or I'll keel-haul you. If you do not understand that, it means talk less and do what you're told, or I'll kick the slats out of you. Get me?"

"Sailors don't care," said Tony.

George retired into the wheel-house, and started the engines. The *Rose* slid away from the jetty, gathered speed, and began to swing a little to the lazy

rollers. The cliffs, crowned with the swelling green of grass and woods, showed now in all their rugged beauty, seeming about to topple forward on the white strip of shingle at their base. The winding path looked as if even the most blasé of goats might be excused for hesitating to risk its descent, while gulls at rest on ledges of the rock seemed in imminent danger of breaking their necks. The cliffs appeared as steep and as tall, Tony said, as a fisherman's tale.

"These philosophical meanderings of yours," George said testily, "have the same effect on me as a sour apple. You talk, and talk, and talk, but you never *do* anything. You give me a pain in the neck."

Tony turned to him in some surprise. They were alone in the wheel-house, George at the wheel.

"You sound a little peeved," said Tony. "There is a little subtle something in your voice that tells us that all is not well with the Trent digestion. Are we deceived in thinking there has lately been a certain shortness in your manner?"

"Listen to me," said George. "Why are we headed for this blessed island, anyway? Why did I let the mater foist this ghastly scheme on us, instead of nipping it in the bud? Why?"

"All things are with Allah," said Tony. By Allah he meant his hostess.

"Forget it. Allah had nothing to do with this. There's just one reason, you idiot—I want to give you a chance to become engaged to Denise."

"Alas! the possibility is remote."

"Nothing of the sort! On the island you'll have more chances of getting her away from the crowd than you ever would ashore. She'll have nothing to do but listen to you talking, and go swimming with you, and look at the moon with you, and explore the castle with you—unless, of course, you let Wuthers or Sprigg cut you out."

"Pooh!" said Tony. "We Waynes fear no man."

"Then pull up your socks, and pop the question."

"We must first make a favourable impression."

"You won't make it by flirting with Joan."

"Oh-ho!" said Tony. "Sets the wind in that quarter?"

"What the devil do you mean?"

"For an instant," said Tony, "we believed your interest in our progress benevolently altruistic; but this is not so. A base motive reveals itself, like some foul serpent rearing its loathly head from its native slime. What we thought the pure gold of friendship proves to be but the cheap plate of duplicity. You urge us," said Tony, "to woo Denise, not because of any pleasure you might take in the pretty romance, but because you would not have us woo Joan."

"Look here, you boob——"

"No hard words," said Tony. "No murderous looks. Remember the days of our youth, when we frolicked in innocence on the green, happy in our ignorance that one day a woman would come between us. Remember,"

said Tony, stepping out to the deck, "that dear, dead days beyond recall, and shed a tear that this black cloud has come to replace with shadow the sunshine of our amity. Remember, also, that love knows no laws, laughs at locksmiths, and makes the world continue to circumnavigate its orbit. Pondering on these truths," said Tony, "you will, we trust, find happiness." With a last sad smile he drifted for'ard, where the three girls stood with Wuther, and Rev. David, and Sprigg.

"Isn't this just too perfectly sweet?" said Lady Pat. With one slim hand she indicated the horizon in general, turning the full current of her wonderful eyes on Tony.

There was some excuse for her. The sky was a limpid blue, and so was the sea. The island ahead was a mass of vivid green, girdled by white beaches. The air was warm, pleasantly tempered by the gentle breeze of their progress. Only the melancholy crying of the gulls, the slap of waves against the hull, and the curiously repellent laugh of Colonel Campbell, broke the silence. Peace lay everywhere.

"It reminds me," said Sprigg, "of that little thing——"

"Hush!" said Tony softly. "Hush! Mere poetry could not describe this, friend Sprigg. Words at best are but empty, foolish things. Let us absorb the atmosphere in silence."

Sprigg shot him a dubious glance, but subsided. The

shadow of a smile passed from one to another of the three girls.

The island came closer and closer. They saw, now, the caves of shadow beneath its trees, the warm tints of its rocks, the snowy line where the waves broke gently on its beaches. It seemed perhaps two miles long, a mile wide.

The grey bulk of the castle came into view, a ruin of stone half-hidden by the trees, sleeping in the kindly sunshine. Dreaming, mayhap, of the days when armed knights had tilted in its courtyard, while lovely ladies watched wide-eyed from its casements, hands at bosom and breath stilled; or damosels sighed wistfully, from its towers peering across the sea at that green land where they knew romance awaited them; or men went forth to battle for their king, or to chase the deer on the wooded slopes of the mainland.

But the men were gone, and the lovely ladies were dust, and only the sob of the wind about its broken walls and in the trees replaced their laughter and the sharp clatter of their steel. So the old castle slept; and where knights had died, weeds grew; and where maidens had sighed, birds built their nests; and where men-at-arms had paced with measured tread, rats scampered and squealed.

Yet the green land across the narrow strip of sea remained unchanged, and there other men and other maidens loved and laughed, and grew old and bowed,

and went their way, while still the old castle guarded the blue water and defied the rolling years.

A little bay came in sight, sheltered between rocky bluffs, blue against the sun-kissed curve of shingle. Into this the *Rose* turned her sharp bow. George came for'ard and let down the anchor, then, with the Rev. David's help, swung the two dinghies to the water.

"We'll have to make a couple of trips of it," he said. "Ladies first. Calm down, everybody; this isn't a mid-ocean tragedy. Lady Pat, if you sit on the gun'nle you'll fall in. You're meant to sit on the seats, you know. Yes, peculiar, isn't it? Makes you wonder if the builders knew what they were doing. All right? Tight, then." He pushed off, and brought his passengers safely ashore, the Rev. David following with the second dinghy. Another trip landed the men.

"The Swiss Family Robinson has arrived," said Tony. He glanced down at his loose flannels. "Something a little less conventional might be more in keeping with the part, you think? More natural, if you understand. A garment of leaves, perhaps? Modest, yet becoming. We would look at our best. But these bags have a certain elusive charm all their own. Selwyn here tells me he intends to try out the leaves." Tony raised his eyebrows at the Rev. David. "I misapprehend you? Well, well! George might be persuaded to favour us with his justly notorious impersonation of Pan. In that part George is a sensation, a riot. He has appeared before all the crowned

heads of Europe. Especially the bobbed heads. Why is he so successful? For the same reason," said Tony, "as the leading boy in a pantomime is a girl. He has the curves."

"Tony," said Mrs. Trent, "you're positively revolting. Come and see the tents, everybody."

She led them up the beach and through the woods to a glade so carpeted with bluebells that it seemed a fragment fallen from the sky. Here tents stood in two orderly rows, on either side the open space, shaded by the stout-boled oaks.

"Ladies in this row," Mrs. Trent said; "men in this. Two in a tent. Settle your own partners."

Denise and Joan glanced at each other, and smiled. Tony, seizing his opportunity with the promptitude that distinguishes your truly great mind, tapped the Rev. David on the shoulder.

"Yes?" he said. "How about it, eater up of black men? You and I could live in harmony, I think?"

"Certainly," said the Rev. David, beaming. "It will be an opportunity for us to get to know each other better."

"Attaboy!" said Tony approvingly. "We are all for this universal brotherhood bunk. We Waynes admit no superiors."

"There are cups and plates and things in every tent," said Mrs. Trent. "And a saucepan, a pot, and a pan for everyone. The grub is in that tent at the end of the row. George will bring fresh supplies every day,

and milk. There's a splendid well in the castle yard, so we'll have no trouble about water."

"Until we get typhoid," said her husband gloomily. "Then we'll die like flies."

"Don't be ridiculous, George! The water is perfectly pure. Now, listen. Each tent must light its own fire, and everybody must cook their own food, and wash their own dishes. When that's done, you're free to do as you please. Everybody works. Otherwise it wouldn't be any fun, would it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Trent.

She quelled him with a nasty look. "So that's all right, isn't it? Now you can start out to explore. Dinner's at seven, or when you've cooked it. I'd advise you all to begin early."

"Let's look over the castle," Joan said. "Coming, Denise? Pat? Tony?" She caught the Rev. David's eye, saw how eagerly, yet how timidly he watched her, and, on sudden impulse, offered him her arm. "You know the way, don't you, Mr. Selwyn?"

"Yes!" said the Rev. David. "Oh, yes!" He started off at a great pace, then slowed as she protested.

"You know," she said roguishly. "I think I'll call you Dave—if I may. It's not irreverent, is it?" She looked up into his face with a most bewitching expression. At least, the Rev. David thought it bewitching. "You're so much older than I am—and so grave! Sometimes when you look at me I feel just

like I used to years ago when nurse caught me stealing cake."

The Rev. David would have given much to know whether or not she was serious. He looked down into her grey eyes in an attempt to solve the mystery, and went a little dizzy. The solution of other problems might be there; but not of his. He looked away quickly. He must remember that this girl was his deadly enemy, and be wary. No use making a fool of himself.

"Nothing could be further from my thoughts," he said a little stiffly.

"Now you're angry with me," said Joan, pouting.

The Rev. David eyed her dubiously. He could not forget that he dealt with a consummate actress.

"No," he said. "No."

"Oh, quite," said Joan.

They came to the castle, a mellow old place of ivied walls and crumbling battlements. The rustle of trees soothed it in its long sleep, and their leaves cast shadows on its softened greyness. Grim relic of grim days, year after year of quiet peace had changed it slowly, until now the stains in its courtyard had faded and faded as the moss spread and the nettles sprang in growing rifts between the stone, and it had become a place of dreams instead of deeds.

They entered the courtyard through the broken gateway, and found there a well in which a tiny spring bubbled, sending across the flags a gentle stream to

hasten the growth of weeds in which it vanished. They stood in the shadow of the keep, jackdaws peering bright-eyed down at them, gazing at this massive pile that in the past had known so much love and hate, and now knew desolation.

"You know," said Lady Pat, "it makes you feel small, doesn't it?"

Tony, who held her arm, looked down at her in some surprise. Her wonderful eyes were dreamy, and her mouth was almost sad. It seemed that for an instant he saw the real Lady Patricia Glencombe, gentle and demure, peeping shyly from behind the mask imposed on her by the times in which she lived. It was his first glimpse of this secretive inner girl, a stranger utterly; and he liked her. She met his glance, and smiled. He knew then that she had read his thought, and very gently he tightened the pressure of his fingers on her arm.

"It does," he said. "When we reflect that here Sir Guy the Cockeyed beat to death his rival in the lists of love, Rollo the Humpbacked, in an encounter lasting twenty-three rounds, hit or miss, and no hold barred, we gaze on the spot with fitting reverence. Historians," said Tony, "tell us that Sir Rollo had to be taken from his armour in sections. When eventually they got him out, and tried to fit the pieces together, some doubt was created as to whether it was really Sir Rollo, or somebody masquerading in his armour. This difficulty was cleared up only when an observant bystander

pointed out the fact that they had one of his heels where Nature had intended him to wear a nose, and other misfits of a like character. Friends of the deceased said the difference these made was really astonishing. Interest," said Tony, "was added to the affair by the elopement, in the meantime, of the damosel over whom they had fought, which seems to prove the gentle sex has altered little if at all."

"Tony," said Joan, "are you ever serious?"

"Not if I can possibly avoid it. When," said Tony, "we see in our morning paper that another perplexed young man has solved all his problems by submitting them to Father Thames or a razor wielded not wisely but too well, we can with reasonable certainty assume that there goes one who has failed to treat life as a joke, and for that reason wearied of it."

"I don't know that that's a nice philosophy," said Joan. "We should be serious about some things."

"Yes?"

"Love, and what else?"

"Not love. No. Not love. Love," said Tony, "is a matter for laughter and smiles, not tears and sighs."

"What *would* you be serious about, then?"

Tony wrinkled his brow. "Horse-racing and food. A sordid outlook, perhaps; but what would you? This is a sordid world. These, at least, can be relied on, the one to beggar us, the other to fortify us against our losses."

"Let me," said the Rev. David, "show you over the dungeons."

He showed them over the dungeons, showed them the rusty gyves that had known many a bleeding wrist, the stone worn hollow by restless feet, the slits of windows with edges rounded by groping hands that strove to lift weak bodies to the light and the stirring air.

"What a place for ghosts!" he said. "The wind out there might be their sighs, and the spring in the courtyard their tears."

"Not the place I'd choose to spend a night," Lady Pat said. "Come on out into the sunshine."

Tony rapped his knuckles on the great door of the dungeons as they passed out. "Still as good as new. They had the knack of making things to last in ye olden days. They made one thing that will last for ever."

"What's that?" Denise asked.

"England."

They climbed a broken stair in one of the towers, and over the moss-grown battlements looked down on Hawkscliff Island and the sea, and the green land from which they had come, all bathed in the golden sunshine. Then they turned, and gazed towards distant France.

"Can't you see the fleet of William of Normandy coming in?" said Joan dreamily. "Can't you see the sun shining on their armour and their swords, and the

flutter of their banners? Isn't it funny how old places make us think of old things? I suppose men stood where we're standing now, and watched the Armada coming up channel with Drake's ships astern, or watched Monmouth's little fleet sail into the west. And long, long before that, I suppose the ship passed here that carried the Black Prince and his knights to France, and the ship that brought King John back a prisoner. Poor King John! He died a prisoner because his nobles were too mean to pay his ransom. Maybe they didn't want him back again, though."

So they talked of things old and new throughout the drowsy afternoon until the Rev. David glanced at his watch, and told them it was after six. They went down the crumbling stair, and through the courtyard, and along under the quiet oaks towards the glade where the camp lay.

As they neared it, they overtook Mr. Trent. Both his manner and walk suggested irritation, and when they hailed him he turned to them a face of frank ill-humour. He seemed to mutter to himself.

"Something has roused the lion in the last of the Trents," Tony said softly.

"A whole menagerie of them," said Joan.

"I suppose it's the prospect of missing a proper dinner," said George unfeelingly.

"Hush!" said Denise.

Mr. Trent voiced his complaint while still twenty yards separated them.

"There's not a butterfly on the whole damned island," said Mr. Trent.

3

"To make an acceptable meal of fried beefsteak," said Tony, "the following ingredients are necessary. Item, one beefsteak, as large as the pan will hold, from an inch to an inch and a half thick. Item, enough onions to smother the beefsteak. Item, a few spoonfuls of grease. Item, pepper and salt. Item, a plate, knife, and fork. In extreme cases the knife and fork can be dispensed with. Item, bread and butter. Item, a sound molar system, either natural or artificial. Item, something to drink. Item, an appetite.

"Of these," said Tony, "we can supply the appetite and the molar system. Mrs. Trent, will you supply the rest? We want a circular beefsteak about a foot in diameter. We may take as much as we want? Splendid! How many onions will be needed to smother this, Mrs. Trent? About two? We shall take four, in case your estimate inclines to the conservative. As to the other items——"

"Tony," said Mrs. Trent, "you're a nuisance. Apart from the actual grub, you'll find everything you need in your tent."

"It's the actual grub we want," said Tony. "Gad-zooks! but this right noble beefsteak should see us through."

"If you eat all that, you're going to have indigestion."

"Ha-ha!" said Tony in polite derision. "We Waynes have ever been good trenchermen. Not for us the dainty foods of the dyspeptic. Leave us to trifle with some good roast beef, or a stout ham, or a well-nourished turkey, or a sweetly-rounded leg of mutton, and we are well content. Or, as our American cousins would have it, sitting pretty. We eat because we like to eat, not because it is necessary."

"Eat, then," said Mrs. Trent. "Run away, like a good boy. Tony! Frighten the flies off that steak."

"That's all right," said Tony; "they'll get off when I put it on the pan." The beefsteak in a paper in one hand, he lounged across to where Joan tried hard to light a fire.

"Bother the beastly thing!" said Joan. "Darn it! Say a few cuss-words for me, Tony; I've used all mine, and nearly all my matches, and the beastly thing *won't* light."

"Pooh, pooh!" said Tony. He laid the beefsteak on the ground, knelt, and rearranged the little pile of half-burned sticks. "A scrap of paper underneath, you sec." He touched a match to it, and the flame spread upward. Across it he smiled at her. "The last of the Waynes kneels at your feet."

"Does he?" said Joan with interest. "I hope he pulls up his socks and gets that letter soon." She glanced towards the Rev. David, busy outside his tent.

"While he sleeps," Tony assured her, "we will go through the Selwyn pockets. We have in mind the reward."

"I'm almost sorry I promised that reward, Tony."

Tony gathered up his beefsteak. "We Waynes were never bargain-drivers. Say the word, and the letter shall be yours without any reward other than your smile."

"No," Joan said, "I'll keep my word."

"And where," said Tony, "is Denise?"

"Gathering sticks somewhere, Tony. How long will this last?"

He raised his eyebrows. "Don't you just love it?"

"I don't know yet. I'm doubtful, though I hate to disappoint Mrs. Trent."

"It won't last longer than three days," said Tony.

"No. We think not. Trent senior looks on his spouse with the eye jaundiced. There are no butterflies on the island. Trent junior looks on the universe with the eye jaundiced, because you and I find in each other's company an increasing delight."

"I hadn't noticed it," said Joan.

"Lady Pat will be bored to death to-morrow. Denise, I think, would rather like to stay on. She is all for the quiet life, like auntie and her cats. The older people would like to go now, but are too polite to say so. Friend Selwyn seems content enough. Comrade Wuthers is like a lion in a cage. He is of the great open spaces, such as Trafalgar Square and

Piccadilly Circus, Comrade Wuthers. Sprigg we judge to be apathetic. He will write an ode eclipsing Dryden's lines on Alexander Selkirk. Or was it Dryden? However.

"The general concensus of opinion," said Tony, summing up, "seems to be that Mrs. Trent has handed us a gold brick, or, as you might put it, laid us a dead stymie. But we must credit her with the best intentions. More murders," said Tony, "have been caused by good intentions than by the most bitter hate."

"You were careful not to mention your own view," said Joan.

"I was," said Tony.

Denise came from the wood with a bundle of sticks. She was flushed from her exertions, and her eyes were bright. Her hair had fallen to one side, giving her a piquantly raffish appearance. Tony, observing her, felt like the man who sees a fiver dropped at his feet by the playful wind. She dumped the sticks by the fire, and sat down with a sigh.

"We should not venture into the woods alone," said Tony. "The woods are dangerous."

"Dangerous?" said Denise.

Tony nodded. "There was a young girl named Anita, who one day in the woods met a cheetah. She turned to flee, or swarm up a tree, but the cheetah pursuedah and eatah."

"If I'd met a cheetah just now, I'd have brought it back for the pot. I'm ravenous."

"Gaze on this goodly steak," said Tony. "These globular onions." He leaned a little towards them, sinking his voice. "When I ask you to come to the castle by moonlight, come. But don't bring Mrs. Trent." With a last mysterious glance he went his way.

"I wonder what he meant by that?" said Joan. "Something besides rain in the wind."

"Can you cook?" said Denise. "I'll show you. . . ."

Silence fell on the glade, broken only by the rattle of plates and false teeth, and the sharp yelp of some unfortunate burned by a spark. Mrs. Trent rested from her labours of dispensing food, and began to prepare her own dinner. She wasn't at all sure that her experiment was a success; things might, after all, be different on a coral island. The air, or something. She had a suspicion her guests hankered for the flesh-pots of Hawkscliff. Still, there was time yet.

"In Bomongoland," said the Rev. David, "the natives eat locusts fried in fat. And very good they are, too."

"Some people," said Tony, "subsist entirely on nuts. The remark that they are themselves nuts is so obvious as to be unnecessary."

"The staple diet of the Eskimos, I hear, is blubber."

"We have read of Americans who regularly ate boiled squash, and suffered no ill-effects."

"The South Sea Islanders eat raw fish."

"The British Islanders," Tony said, "eat raw beef,

and the Scotsman devours haggis. And a sea slug means more to a Chinese mandarin than a new wife."

"Nightingales' tongues was a favourite dish with the ancient Romans."

"In China, new-born mice dipped in syrup are considered a delicacy."

"Your mention of mice reminds me that dormice are still eaten in Italy."

"Yet, before all these," said Tony, "give me a plate of fried steak smothered in onions, a few cups of coffee, and half a loaf. With these we can make some play worthy the noble name of Wayne."

"I'm rather partial to ham, myself," the Rev. David confessed. "Or a slice of cold tongue."

"There is," said Tony, "something about a pork chop, a certain succulence. . . ."

The Rev. David nodded. "A devilled kidney goes well at times."

"As an appetizer," said Tony, "roast turkey has points."

"Give me," said the Rev. David dreamily, "baked elephant's foot."

"As one explorer to another," said Tony, "did you ever taste monkey?"

The Rev. David looked at him over a morsel of steak poised half-way to his mouth. "You and I," he said, "must get to know each other better. We have many preferences in common."

"There's a moonlight expedition to the castle," said Tony. "Be sure to come."

"Charming."

"So romantic."

"Uh-huh! You think," said the Rev. David a little timidly, "Joan has forgotten that letter I was idiot enough to write to the papers?"

Tony looked dubious. "You never can tell with women. They make goo-goo eyes at a man when they're ready to cut his throat, and hand him the frozen mitt when they'd kiss his feet. Now take Joan," said Tony spacioisly. "Her smile would make Mona Lisa look like a flapper ogling Ivor Novello. She's like a swamp, all beautifully green and even; but take one step wrong, and you're down. Woman," said Tony, "is the principal reason for a man's attaining Heaven."

"I thought they helped him to the other place," said the Rev. David.

"So many hold; but we think not. No. They give him," said Tony, "a hell of a time here; so would it be just to give him a hell of a time in the next world as well?"

"Something in that." The Rev. David mopped up his plate with a slice of bread. "That's the best feed I've had since I left Bomongoland. So you think Joan is still hostile?"

"She may be," said Tony, "without showing it. In your shoes, friend Selwyn, we would move with caution. We would emulate the cat in the strange

district. We would place no trust in the disarming smile, the friendly word. No. That letter was a blunder of the first magnitude."

"One I'll never make again."

"You must have loosed the vials of your wrath on our immoral stage in no uncertain manner. Or, you came down heavy with both feet."

"I *was* a bit startled."

"We should not take these things to heart," said Tony. "We see a girl in bathing-costume, and think no more of it than of the wax figures in a shop window. Yet the same girl in the same garb, on the stage, is considered indecently clad. Why?"

"Because," said Tony, "some people go to the theatre for the sole purpose of seeing girls indecently clad, and see them they do, whether they are there or not. These people have given the theatre a bad name. As a consequence, what arouses no comment in the clean sunshine becomes immodest in the glare of the footlights."

"Now no girl," said Tony, "could be more modest than Joan. No mind could be purer than hers. She still takes a quaint interest in the old Gladstone bag at home, believing that in this she arrived from some regions unknown, chaperoned by the family doctor. I doubt," said Tony seriously, "if she would understand a questionable joke. Yet, just because the stage is popularly regarded as immoral, and because she is a successful actress, there are men and women who would not have the least respect for her, though she has the

heart of a child. You are not one of them; but your unconsidered letter may have given her the impression that you are. Your only course is to disabuse her of the idea as speedily as possible."

"You don't suggest how it should be done," said the Rev. David gloomily.

Tony cocked an eye at him. "Was the letter so snappy as the paper said?"

"Worse."

"Worse?" Tony whistled. "We had meant to suggest that you show it to her; but that seems scarcely feasible if what you say is true. Why do you keep it?"

"To remind me of my own folly. It is," said the Rev. David, "a monument of ignorance and narrow-mindedness. It will always remind me of what a fool a man can be unless he's careful."

"In which case," said Tony soothingly, "at least it has done some good." He ruminated. He had made his point; the letter was still in existence. If not on the island, it was in the Rev. David's room at Hawks-cliff. It should be easily procurable. At least it was a point of interest between himself and Joan. It helped their friendship.

Tony thought about Joan and Denise and Lady Pat. If luck was with him, he would marry one of the three. Preferably which? Mentally, to that poser he replied, with natural politeness and polish, "Search me." He preserved on the subject a mind so open as to resemble

closely the perfect vacuum. All he knew was that any one of the three would be too good for him, taking his motives into consideration.

But he didn't mean to let them suspect that. No.

4

The ghosts of Hawkscliff Castle rose from their cold lairs and clustered in the moonlit courtyard. The stars shone through them, and they cast no shadow; but they were there. Grey-bearded men, and youths, portly matrons and slender maidens, knights and vassal, they pressed in a silent throng about these mortals who laughed where they themselves had laughed when the world was younger. And, if they were displeased, they gave no sign of it. So perhaps they were not displeased. Perhaps they were even pleased. Anyway, it didn't matter. They couldn't do anything.

On a block of masonry fallen from the battlements was spread a tablecloth. On this were the remains of a roast turkey, which seemed to have been a victim to elephantiasis, a ham, half a dozen bottles of wine, two cakes, two tins of biscuits, and an enormous box of chocolates. In various attitudes of ease about it were Denise, Lady Pat, and Joan, George, the Rev. David, and Tony. Tony and the Rev. David still toyed absent-mindedly with their knives; but the others were plainly content to call it a day. Presently, with a sigh, even these two desisted.

"Ah!" said Tony. He made it singularly expressive.

"We'll probably all have nightmares," said Denise.
"But it was worth the risk."

"There spoke the spirit that has made America what she is," said Tony. "Our thanks are due to George for filling the hold of his vessel with these and other goodly provisions. That was a stroke of true genius."

"I hadn't been so hungry for years," said Lady Pat.
"Only for this I'd have died in the night."

"The mater is an idealist," said George. "I am a materialist."

"That port is excellent," said the Rev. David reflectively. "Excellent!"

"Everything is excellent," said Joan, choosing a liqueur chocolate with great deliberation. "Let's drink George's health."

"A sound idea," said Tony.

They drank George's health, very solemnly. George retaliated.

"Ladies and gentlemen, on this auspicious occasion it affords me great pleasure to give you Joan, our most popular actress. Elbows up and no heel-taps."

They drank to Joan.

The Rev. David rose.

"Here, on this historic spot where men have died for England, we should remember that one amongst us comes from a far country where the mother-tongue is spoken. I beg your pardon, Tony?"

"Nothing, nothing. Go to it!"

"I give you Miss Brooks and her native land."

They drank to Miss Brooks and her native land.

"There's no more port left," said Tony regretfully.

"However, there's some sherry, and a little burgundy. So let us drink to the ghosts who haunt this place, to the men who fought here, and the women who loved here, to the laughter that rang here, and the tears that fell here." He lifted his glass. "To the glorious past."

They drank to the glorious past.

"And what about the future?" said Lady Pat.

"That's what interests us most."

They drank to the future.

Denise came to her feet, laughing. "To the thing that gave us most pleasure to-night, the turkey whose bones lie before us. Not long ago he strutted about some yard . . . and now . . . and now . . ." She laughed again. "I forget what I meant to say, but it doesn't matter. To the turkey."

They drank to the turkey.

"Did you ever see the Bomongo war-dance?" said the Rev. David. His eyes gleamed a little in the moonlight. "It's extraordinary! They start like this." He came to his feet, and moved a few unsteady steps into the open, then stood swaying.

"Just like a drunk," said Tony. "Drunk with blood-lust, we presume?"

"They start," said the Rev. David again, with dignity, "like this." He executed an abrupt hop from

one foot to the other, at the same time leaping forward and bending at the knees. "Then they go on like this." He repeated the manœuvre. "Of course, there should be music—drums."

"Wait a minute, old scout," said George. He picked up a biscuit-tin, emptied its contents on the cloth, and gripped it bottom up between his knees. Gripping a bottle by the neck he tried the improvised drum. It worked satisfactorily—in fact, splendidly.

"Good!" said the Rev. David. "Not too fast." He beat time with one hand. "Rub, rub, rubba-dub-dub, rub, rub, rubba-dub-dub. Keep that up, and I'll show you something."

True to his word, he showed them something. He danced with an abandon that must have turned a Pawnee medicine-man livid with envy. He bounded into the air wearing an expression of diabolical malignity, obeying the pull of gravity, only to bound still higher. He whirled his arms, he crouched, he leaped forward, he struck down some invisible foe and jumped on his face. He stalked the same foe with all the stealth of a hungry leopard, and again jumped on his face. Half-way through the performance he removed his coat and tossed it to one side.

"Attaboy!" Tony cried encouragingly. "The original Dancing Dervish had nothing on you. No, sir! He wasn't in your class."

The Rev. David, flushed, sweating, danced on. Round and round he went in a circle, stamping and

shuffling and leaping as if possessed of a devil. *Thud, thud, thud* went the drum. . . .

"Stop, please!" Joan cried. "You're making me dizzy."

"Me, too," said Denise. "Things are all blurred."

The Rev. David, panting, collapsed in a heap.

"By Jove!" George said, admiringly. "I didn't think you had it in you, Dave."

"Neither . . . did I," admitted the Rev. David. "But I feel extraordinarily . . . energetic. Exhilarated."

"You looked it," said Lady Pat. "Have a drink to cool you down."

The Rev. David had a drink to cool him down.

"You know," he said, "it was almost like sacrilege, wasn't it? Or don't you think so? I mean, the thought of the things that happened here is enough to"—he looked from one to another of his listeners—"to make one think of the things that happened here."

"You are right," said Tony gravely. "Quite right. It is. Yes."

"Tournaments and things," said the Rev. David. "Knights fighting for the honour of their ladies. Though it has always seemed to me," said the Rev. David, "a little peculiar that the ladies' honour needed fighting for. It shouldn't have been necessary." He beamed upon his audience. "It's not necessary now."

"No," said George. "They do it themselves. The men need only fight in self-defence."

"George," said the Rev. David, "may I take exception to that remark?"

"If you please."

"I do."

"That's splendid."

"In the good old days," said the Rev. David, "we would mount our trusty steeds and prove our words upon each other's bodies. You at one end of the courtyard, I at the other. . . ."

"Let's try it," said George. "We can do without our trusty steeds. Mine is home in the garage."

"We have no swords," said the Rev. David with regret.

"A couple of sticks will do as well."

"True! You think of everything, George."

"Nearly everything," George admitted. They went arm-in-arm into the woods to find two sticks.

"Dave is funny," Joan said. "Very funny. . . . He's only a boy. Denise, you're asleep! Wake up!"

"Not time to get up yet," Denise mumbled. "The alarm didn't go."

Joan shook her. "Bless the child! *Will* you wake up? Dave and George are going to have a tournament."

"A tournament?" Denise yawned. "What do they want with it? I'm *sleepy*."

"So'm I," said Lady Pat. "Look at Tony, sitting there like a boiled owl."

"A boiled owl what?" said Tony. He chuckled.

The situation appealed to his impish sense of humour.

George and the Rev. David returned, each with a stick some four feet long. They retired to opposite ends of the courtyard, then charged, sticks up.

"A Selwyn! A Selwyn!" bellowed the Rev. David, aiming a savage blow at George's head. George parried dexterously, and proved that the point was better than edge, by poking his opponent in the solar plexus. The Rev. David said "Ouch!" and sat down, clasping the wound.

"Ah-ha!" George yelled. "Yield ye! Have at you! Be on your feet, or my trusty blade shall drink your blood." He advanced, stick up, a savage gleam in his eye.

"George!" Tony cried, alarmed. "Defend the castle! Hold the gate!"

George looked around. "Hold the gate? What for? It's not moving."

"We are betrayed! A Trent! A Trent!"

"A Trent! A Trent!" George roared, galloping across the courtyard. "A Trent. . . ."

"Georgel"

"Now the fun starts," Tony murmured to himself.

Mrs. Trent stood in the great gateway. George quailed before her glance. She advanced grimly. She came to a halt beside the littered cloth, and stared wide-eyed at the three girls. Joan and Lady Pat smiled at her; Denise was peacefully asleep. George, like the bad lad of popular fiction, stole forth into the night.

"Are you all mad?" said Mrs. Trent. "We heard you down at the camp." Her eye wandered on. She saw the bottles, and blenched. "Merciful heavens! You're all drunk!"

"Not all," said Tony. "Not all. The last of the Waynes is sober."

CHAPTER FIVE

I

MR. TRENT poked his nose through the flap of the tent, and gazed on the world with a dyspeptic eye. He was a man who liked his meals, breakfast in particular; but for some reason he felt far from hungry this morning. Something in the atmosphere reminded him vividly of the days of his youth.

The dinner he had eaten the previous night had much to do with that, he supposed. He wondered what sort of an animal had supplied the steaks. A vigorous and muscular beast it had been. Perhaps a mountain goat the butcher had found somewhere. Or maybe a donkey, left behind by the gypsies to die. These butchers were unscrupulous blackguards. They would, Mr. Trent suspected, think nothing of cutting up a sea-cow if one happened to be washed ashore, and selling the meat as prime Herefordshire beef.

Mr. Trent looked about him. The glade was deserted. He sniffed his contempt. Quite a number of the campers had announced their intention of taking a plunge in the sea at dawn. Mr. Trent suspected they wouldn't know the dawn if they saw it other than through the windows of a night-club. They wouldn't stir for another hour yet. Not that he'd blame them;

but they should can that bunk about plunging at dawn.

Mr. Trent emerged into the open, revealing to an interested robin the fact that he was fully clothed. He glanced down the twin lines of tents. All were closed except his own. With a second sniff he made towards the beach.

Here he pushed one of the dinghies into the water and headed for the *Rose*. Half an hour later he was in the library at Hawkscliff, going over his collection of butterflies. This was the only gleam of sunshine in his life.

A little later on he went out with a net, though pessimistic about making a kill so early in the day. His fears were realized: no butterflies worth notice were abroad.

"Damn everything!" said Mr. Trent. "Blast everybody!"

He suddenly realized that he was hungry. The run to the mainland, together with his walk, had given him an appetite. Something like good humour returned to him. A man can enjoy himself when he has an appetite and the means to assuage it. Mr. Trent turned towards Hawkscliff, then halted. He was closer to the village than to the house, and they kept a very good ham at the inn. To the inn he went.

The hungry man who can frown in the face of a plateful of eggs and bacon, toast, marmalade, and coffee, is inhuman. Mr. Trent was very human. In the few intervals between attempts to fill his mouth

with one or all of the victuals before him, he beamed on the world. Things looked brighter. The sun was in the sky and the birds were singing. Mr. Trent lit his pipe, stretched out his legs, and leaned back with a sigh of content.

This mood was short-lived. Mr. Trent remembered that he would have to cook his own lunch, and would suffer his better half's displeasure for not having cooked his own breakfast. The sooner this Robinson Crusoe scheme can to an end the better. Mr. Trent thought, bitterly, he might be allowed a little peace at his time of life. Hang it all, he had worked hard enough for it. Like a burglar at work, all he wanted was to be left alone.

"This 'ere gover'ment," said a voice from the bench outside the window, "ain't no gover'ment for me."

"You're right, it ain't," said a second voice with embellishments.

"This 'ere berloody gover'ment," said the first voice, argumentatively, "don't give no thought to the workin' classes. Not to the fellers like me an' you, Jem, it don't."

"No more it don't," agreed Jem.

"They rides around in their Rolls-Royces wot we works for until we got bunions on our 'ands, an' they takes a penny off this an' tuppence off that, but they don't take no penny off the beer. An' why? Now answer me that, Jem—why? Because they don't drink beer, they don't. That's why."

"No more they don't," said Jem. "Brandy they drink, an' gin, an' whisky-an'-soder. An' cocktails, Bill."

"Beer," said Bill, "ain't for the likes o' them. Hogwash it is. This 'ere gover'ment ain't the right gover'ment a-tall."

Mr. Trent moved to the window, and looked out at the occupants of the bench. These were two knights of the road, ragged, unwashed, magnificently at ease. Despite the sultry weather, each wore several waistcoats, and, Mr. Trent suspected, several pairs of trousers. But between them they could not have mustered a dozen buttons. The trousers of one were held up by a length of light rope in the form of a belt, and of the other by braces secured with nails and twists of wire in a manner more ingenious than dressy.

Their coats were several years behind the fashion, and seemed mainly to consist of pocket-linings, some of which bulged suspiciously. Taken at a glance, they were as unsavoury a pair as Mr. Trent had seen for some time. If ever they had worked, it had been at a time now so long past that they remembered only enough to make them avoid it in the present. Any bunions they suffered from had been earned in walking away from districts where there was the least likelihood of being employed against their will.

"An' we got shemales bossin' us now," said the first speaker, referred to by his comrade as Bill. "She-males wiv cropped 'eads like they been in chokey, an'

short skirts an' silk stockin's an' other things you wouldn't know nothin' about, never 'avin 'ad anythin' to do wiv ladies, but shemales for all that, w'ich you'll see wivout 'avin' to look too 'ard. They wants putting in their places, they do."

Mr. Trent silently agreed with him there. They wanted puttin' in their places, they did.

"If I 'ad one of 'em," said Jem, the man of few words, "I'd know what to do wiv 'er, I would."

"Wot," inquired Bill, "would you do wiv 'er, Jem? I asts yer, wot would you do wiv 'er?"

"I'd give 'er," said Jem, "a back-'anded slash acrost the gob."

"You'd do right," said Bill. "A back-'anded slash acrost the gob 'ud do 'er a 'ell of a lot o' good."

"I ain't got none, though," said Jem, descending abruptly to the prosaic realms of fact. "Leastways, not in this 'ere districk."

"Not 'ere you ain't got none?"

"Not in this districk I ain't."

"No berloody shemale," said Bill, "is goin' to tell *me* wot's wot." He brooded a moment, then wound up his thesis on the gentle sex. "Shemales," he said, "my heye!"

Mr. Trent sighed. In one way, at least, these derelicts were greater than he. They possessed to an astonishing degree what he completely lacked, the courage to keep their womenfolk in place. Mr. Trent might shudder at the thought of quelling his wife with

"a back-'anded slash acrost the gob"; but frequently he wished he could summon courage to deliver a more dignified and less physical reproof. Something, in short, quietly chilling. Unfortunately, his spouse ignored the few weak complaints that passed his lips, and went her way serene and masterful. If only he could for a day be like these men, that day would see for him the last of Hawkscliff Island and cooking his own food.

As he stood mourning there, an idea came to Mr. Trent. A bold idea, frighteningly bold. Such an idea as might have come from the brain of Napoleon, Kublai Khan, or Jesse James.

Mr. Trent, timidly at first, flirted with it. Like the vamp of fiction, it fascinated him, lured him on. Every turn showed him new charms. It was beautiful in its simplicity, wonderful in its completeness. Like General Sherman's remark about war, it covered the subject.

Mr. Trent went out, and seated himself on the bench beside Bill. Not too close to him; but close enough. The two tramps treated him to the impassive stare of the father for the first time confronted with his triplets.

"A fine morning," said Mr. Trent affably.

"For them as 'as time to enjoy it," said Bill. "Not for us workers."

"Have a cigar," said Mr. Trent.

They had a cigar each, bit off the ends, and lit up. They thawed a little.

"How," said Mr. Trent, "would you like a good dinner?"

"Dinner," said the morose Jem, "is the one thing I never did get ernouf of."

"Me, too, neither," said Bill.

"Well," said Mr. Trent, "I can put you in the way of enough grub to keep you a month, and a sovereign apiece into the bargain."

They eyed him in stony silence. Their attitude suggested that this was too good to be true. Doubtless life had long since blasted their fresh young optimism, and made them sceptics.

"I'll explain," said Mr. Trent. "You know the island off-shore a few miles? Well, my wife and a party of friends are camping there at present. The friends are all bored to death, but are too polite to say so. As for me, my word doesn't go at all. Now, I thought if you two fellows landed and stole all the grub, it'd have the effect of . . . well, it should make my wife sick of camping, for the present at least. How about it?"

The knights of the road exchanged glances. Bill put their common thought into words.

"An' wot," said Bill, "if we're copped? Wot then?"

"You won't be copped," said Mr. Trent. "You can't be. There's nobody to cop you."

"Ain't there," inquired Bill, "no gen'lemen in this 'ere party?"

"I'll pass them the word to keep clear. They'll be only too glad of an excuse to leave the island."

"Don't see wot more they want," said Jem. "Nothin' to do an' plenty o' scoff."

Mr. Trent decided not argue that question. "There's some drink there, too," he said. "Whisky, and gin, and brandy, and stuff like that." A little judicious lying in the right place, he thought, could do much good.

"You're sure there ain't no danger o' bein' copped?" insisted Bill.

"Absolutely! And don't forget there's a sovereign apiece for you."

"Make it thirty bob, mister," said Jem tentatively, cocking a bleared eye at Mr. Trent.

"Damned if I do," said Mr. Trent, his business instincts roused. "A quid, and not a penny more. Is it a go?"

They intimated that it was a go.

"Follow along behind me, then," said Mr. Trent, "and I'll show you where to get a boat. By the way, you'd better know how to find the tents. . . ."

All went smoothly as the man who steps on a banana-peel. Mr. Trent left Bill and Jem rowing towards Hawkscliff Island, and headed thither himself in the *Rose*. He found the campers in twos and threes on the shore, washing their breakfast dishes. Landing, he sidled up to Tony.

"Come over here a minute, Tony. I've something to say to you."

Gravely, Tony observed his mysterious air, the conspiratorial glances he cast from side to side. "The plot is discovered?" said Tony. "We are betrayed?"

"Eh?" said Mr. Trent, startled. "What plot?"

"Nothing, nothing," said Tony. "Tell me all."

Mr. Trent told him all, in a hoarse whisper and with nervous glances towards his wife.

"A brainy scheme," said Tony. "A footprint in the sands of time. Yes. You leave me," said Tony, "gasping. England need fear no foe while she has men like you."

"Tell the others to clear off somewhere," said Mr. Trent. "I'll keep an eye on the two hoboes to see they don't get gay with any of the ladies."

"I also," said Tony approvingly. "We must run no risk with merchants of that class. They have," said Tony, "no sense of honour. They have no convictions as to what must be done and what must not be done. In short, they have no *noblesse oblige*."

"Get a move on," said Mr. Trent coarsely.

Tony got a move on. Not because he approved of Mr. Trent's scheme; but because there was nothing else to be done. He warned George, and told him to spread the glad news. "We leave it to you," said Tony. "Yours is the part."

George swore, and passed remarks of a distinctly unfilial nature. He said he believed his father to have

reached his second childhood, to be a doddering old imbecile. Tony listened with an expression of pained reproof. George exhausted his vocabulary the second time, and stamped off to spread the words. One by one the men drifted unostentatiously into the woods. The beach was deserted.

The day was an hour older when Bill and Jem hove in sight. They landed, pulled the boat up a few feet, and looked about them, much as Columbus might have done when he made the greatest blunder of the fifteenth century.

"Over 'ere?" Bill said, pointing. "That's wot 'e said, eh?"

Jem grunted, and they plodded in the direction of the camp. They found it without any trouble. It was deserted but for Mrs. Trent and two other ladies. Mrs. Trent swept majestically forward.

"What are you doing here?"

"Ask me heye, ma'am," Bill retorted easily. Mr. Trent, crouched in the bushes near-by, with difficulty restrained a yelp of admiration. "C'm on, Jem." Bill made for the tent where the supplies were kept. Jem followed like an unsightly but obedient dog.

Mrs. Trent gasped. She had not yet fully recovered from her shock of the previous night, when she had interrupted the festivities in the castle courtyard. This second blow was too much.

"You . . . you . . ." she hissed. "You . . ."
now, ma'am!" Bill said soothingly. "There

ain't no need to go purple in the fice. No need a-tall. All we wants is a bit o' grub to keep our stummicks from settin' solid."

Mrs. Trent screamed. She had sound lungs and a generous mouth, and her scream echoed across Hawks-cliff Island like the blast of a siren, startling birds to flight, sending rabbits to shiver in the deepest corner of their burrows.

"George! Help! *Help!* HELP!"

"Heavens!" Joan said, three hundred yards away. "What was that?"

"Sounded like a seal roaring," said the unfilial George.

Even more distant, Lady Pat's eyes widened at Mrs. Trent's effort. She glanced inquiringly at Comrade Wuthers. "What was that?"

"Somebody shouting," said Comrade Wuthers vaguely. "Maybe Tony."

Lady Pat sniffed. "It'd take a broken leg to make Tony yell like that. It can't mean anything, though."

"And as I was saying, Lenin said to Nitchikoff . . ."

At the same instant, Denise looked at the Rev. David. "What——?"

"My aunt!" the Rev. David said, and bounded away.

So George's duplicity reared its ugly head on this peaceful isle. He had no desire for the expedition to come to an end. The longer it continued, the better for him. Tony here had limitless opportunities of making

a favourable impression on Denise. He himself had limitless opportunities of making a favourable impression on Joan. It was, he felt, a little hard for everything to be messed up just because his venerable parent had indigestion. With malice aforethought he neglected to warn the Rev. David against the coming of Jem and Bill. He chose the Rev. David because he considered himself to have a grudge against that young man.

The Rev. David burst into the open on a scene of pillage. Bill and Jem had spread a sheet on the ground, and on this piled the contents of the larder. This, they told each other was the cat's pyjamas.

"Somethin' gorn wrong," Bill said, seeing the Rev. David.

"Eh?" said Jem. "Wrong? 'Ow wrong?"

"Look out!" Bill roared. "Yer berloody fool. I told yer!"

The Rev. David, launching himself across the green, kicked Jem violently on the seat of the trousers. It was a remarkably effective kick, as Jem was on his knees at the time, and bent forward. Jem came to his feet with a roar and a celerity astonishing in one whose chosen pace was a slouch. He whirled to face the enemy who had attacked him in so base a manner.

"I'm goin'," he said with lurid emphasis, "to take yer apart so's yer own mother won't know yer ag'in. C'm on, Bill."

They advanced on the Rev. David. He waited for them with an unpleasant smile.

"Better take a hand?" Tony whispered, watching from behind a clump of undergrowth.

"Wait a minute," Mr. Trent hissed. "This is going to be awkward. That damn fool George . . . It'd look funny if we showed up now. Wait until he yells for help."

The Rev. David did not yell for help. He retreated enough to quicken his opponents' advance. Then he rushed at them, threw them to the ground, and fell on them.

The immediate proceedings were as mixed as the diners in an American restaurant. Bill and Jem climbed over the Rev. David and appeared to murder him. But at the same time they roared with embarrassment and fury, like men in great pain. The Rev. David was remarkably active for a man so roughly treated. Infrequent glimpses of him showed him to be smiling grimly. A casual onlooker might even have supposed him to be enjoying himself.

"Come on," Tony said, rising. "This is too good to miss." He ambled forward into the clearing with an expression of intelligent interest, took Bill by the collar, and kicked him eleven feet four inches in the direction of the beach. The ladies screamed to him to save the Rev. David. The Rev. David shook off Jem, rose to his feet, and said that that was all right, he didn't want to be saved. Bill and Jem gathered themselves together, ascertained that they had no broken bones, and vanished without delay.

"Davie," said Mrs. Trent in tones of admiring awe, "you're wonderful."

"Just a few tricks I learned from the Bomongos," said the Rev. David modestly. The light of battle gleamed in his eye. He gazed regretfully in the direction taken by the two gentlemen of the open spaces. "Better see those two off the island, eh?"

"I'll see to that," said Mr. Trent hastily. He wished to reward them for their gallant effort.

"I'd better go with you."

"No, no! You stay here with the ladies. I'll attend to the scoundrels." Mr. Trent hurried off.

"You know," said the Rev. David to Tony, "I think it might be as well to follow him."

Mr. Trent overtook his henchmen as they reached the shore.

"Here, you chaps . . ."

"It's that fat ol' ——!" said Bill.

"The blasted ——!" said Jem.

"C'm on an' sock 'im one," said Bill.

"Ay," said Jem.

They advanced with the intention of socking him one. Mr. Trent went purple with fury.

"You ungrateful devils!" he said, and hit Bill on the nose. Bill retaliated by striking him forcibly on the ear, while Jem, the strategist, attacked him on the flank with a hail of ill-directed but well-meant blows. The combatants were warming up both verbally and physically when Tony and the Rev. David appeared.

"Let's duck 'em," said the Rev. David. "They need a bath, anyhow."

"'Ere," Bill roared, "you lemme alone! I'll 'ave the lor on yer!" He floundered knee-deep into the water, fell, and rose swearing with an eloquence to command respect. Mr. Trent, fondling his ear, gasped contemptuous epithets at the retreating Jem. They clambered into the boat, pushed off, and got out the oars. Their language drifted back to the three watchers on the beach, mingled with the gentle whisper of the waves.

"And here," said Tony, "endeth the first lesson."

"What the devil do you mean?" Mr. Trent demanded grumpily.

"We must bow to the will of our womenfolk. The gods fight for them."

"If you call Dave a god," said Mr. Trent, "you're a hell of a long way out."

2

"Isn't there a treasure on the island?" Denise said, watching the blue waves break along the beach. "Or isn't there?"

"Supposed to be," said George, in the tone of one who believes nothing of what he hears and half what he sees.

"History has it," said Tony, "that Sir Rollo the Humpbacked here gathered together his wealth, and any other wealth he could lay his hands on, put it in

a big iron-bound box, and planted it somewhere, in the senile belief that when he had no more mazoozulum on show his wife would hesitate before asking him for a new hat. Also he hoped in this way to frustrate the evil designs of the income-tax collector, a mean guy with a horrid mind. The poor goop was made a monkey of on both counts, but turned his trials to capital by inducing his wife to run off with the tax collector, so, in a manner of speaking, killing two birds with one stone. A short time afterwards, as I believe I have already related to you, he was hacked to death in his own courtyard, and his secret died with him."

"Seriously, though," said Denise, "is there anything in it?"

"Quite possibly there is," said George. "When Henry the Eighth suppressed the monasteries, several on the mainland near here sent their treasure to Hawks-cliff Castle, because its lord was the brother of a Bishop and very friendly to the Church. Henry is supposed to have sent some men down to investigate; but they couldn't find the treasure, and so the rumour got around that it was hidden on the island. Anyway, it's never been found."

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we found it?" said Denise.

"We might, if we looked," said Joan. "But these treasures are about as elusive as the towel in a boarding-house bathroom."

They lay in their bathing-costumes on the warm sand

of the beach, lunch and its trials over, dinner yet several hours ahead. There was little wind, and the gentle wash of the waves was a lullaby almost as effective as a policeman's club. They spoke drowsily, at long intervals; Tony and Denise alone seemed wide awake. Lady Pat lay with her hands shading her eyes, contributing nothing to the conversation; the Rev. David was likewise silent.

"Let's look for it," said Denise.

"The proper time to look for buried treasure," said Joan, "is in the moonlight."

"Let's look for it to-night, then."

"Better tell Mrs. Trent about it first," said Joan. "Otherwise she might think we were off on another wild picnic."

"Pooh!" said George lazily. "The mater's forgotten about that. She was a bit horrified at the time; but it was all right once we'd promised not to do it again."

"There was a young man from Woonsocket," said Tony, "who planned to reach Mars in a rocket. But it somehow fell flat, and his sister, named Pat, now wears his remains in a locket."

"I don't see what that has to do with it," said Denise.

"It illustrates," said Tony with admirable patience, "the futility of planning ahead. We planned to have a feast each night, and Mrs. Trent stepped in and said, 'Nix on the eats'. Leaving us, so to speak, in the position of the cockleman when the tide was full."

"About this treasure, though," said Denise. "We've got to find it."

George stirred. "I think it's a jolly fine idea. We'll look for it to-night when the moon's up."

The moon came up that night like a jaundiced Jack-in-the-box. There was no wind, yet the trees whispered one to another of things they had seen and heard, and here and there a leaf fell with as great commotion as the frail lady in the play. It was a night of witchery and romance. A dangerous night.

"The elves are abroad," said Tony.

"On the Continent?" said Denise.

He slipped an arm through hers. The bulk of the castle rose before them, deserted but for the bats that wheeled about its broken ramparts.

"This is a night for magic."

"You've got to show me," said Denise. "I stopped believing in magic when Santa Claus tore a hole in my only fifteen and sixpenny stockings with a two shilling razor." She laughed. "I was staying with an aunt then, and she somehow mixed the razor up with my presents. It should have gone to a young cousin of mine."

"An unfortunate occurrence," nodded Tony. "But to-night, something tells me, wonderful things will happen."

They stood in the courtyard and looked about them. Tony caught George's piercing eye, and moved across. George led him aside.

"Look here," said George tersely, "bring Denise into the dungeons, and I'll shut the door on you."

"And then, brother?" said Tony.

"I leave that to you," said George. "In her terror she throws herself on your bosom, and you comfort her. The rest should be easy. I mean, you should be engaged before we let you out."

"The plan does not appeal to me," said Tony. "No. I win my woman in some nobler way." He went back to Denise, leaving George repeating himself in low, tremulous tones.

"It's hard to know where to begin, isn't it?" said Joan.

"Seems to me," said Lady Pat, "we should all go different ways." She gazed up into George's eyes. "We'd have a better chance then, wouldn't we?"

"Oh!" said George returning her gaze. "That's a good scheme. We'll take the eastern tower."

"We'll take the west," said Joan eagerly. "Come on, Dave."

"H'm!" said Tony. "Looks as if the dungeons are left for us, Denise."

"They're the most likely place," said Denise. "Look." She showed him an electric torch the size of a fountain-pen. "I came prepared for emergencies, you see. I use this looking for creepy-crawly things in my pyjamas at night."

"Let's have a stab at it, then."

They went forward through the broken door, and down the winding stair, the white beam of the torch pointing on before them. The air grew cold and damp, the darkness pressed in about them like creditors about a bankrupt. Denise pressed closer to Tony. Tony, in a brotherly manner, slid an arm about her waist.

"It's very dark," said Denise, as if in excuse for herself.

They came to the door of the dungeons, and Tony pushed it open. The vaulted chamber grew before them, huge, limitless, mocking the feeble glow of the lamp.

"Ooooh!" said Denise, shivering. She pointed to an arrow of moonlight flung through a grating in the wall. "Doesn't it look weird? I'm sure this place is haunted."

"Hush!" said Tony softly. "Listen."

They listened. From the darkness above came a sound that might have been a stealthy step. Denise clutched Tony's arm.

"Who's there?" Tony called.

Only the faint echo of his own words answered him. They listened again and heard nothing.

"We're imagining things," Denise said, without any great conviction. "Let's go on."

They went on slowly between the rough stone pillars. Shadows leaped and danced before them, retreating at the wink of the torch, slipping forward again when Denise turned in some new direction.

"I'm sure," said Denise, "the treasure's—Tony, what was that?"

"I heard nothing," said Tony untruthfully.

"I did—like a door shutting."

Tony tightened the grip of his arm round her waist. "You're letting the old imagination play you tricks. Come on and we'll find that treasure."

"Blowed if I do." Denise shone the light of the torch in a circle around them. "This place is full of spooks. I'm getting out while I can."

"If you feel like that . . ." said Tony.

They headed for the door. The door was shut.

"I told you so," said Denise, half-triumphant, half-fearful.

"In a case like this," said Tony, "you should fall on my bosom and intimate in no uncertain manner that you rely on me to get you out of danger. You don't feel like doing that?"

"Not just yet," said Denise.

"I feared as much," said Tony. "You modern women are too self-reliant. You give us no chance to exercise our chivalry."

"Exercise it by opening the door," said Denise.

Tony tried the door. With the greatest of ease it resisted his efforts. It had been built to resist efforts like his, and more sincere than his, when men screamed and tore at it until they marked it with their blood. It had been bolted on the outside, he guessed.

"It's only the others having their little joke," he said,

desisting. "If we don't kick up a row they'll grow tired pretty soon."

"I suppose so," said Denise gloomily, sitting down on the step. "But it's very dark, and spooky, and trembly down here, and I hope they don't wait too long."

"Pooh!" said Tony, seating himself beside her. "You should have said you didn't mind so long as I was with you."

"You make a difference, of course," Denise admitted. There was laughter in her voice. "But suppose they let us stay here all night?"

"Well?"

"I'd be hopelessly compromised."

Tony chuckled. "To compromise the modern girl you have to live with her a month or two."

"And then you'd have to marry me," said Denise.

"There's nothing I want more," said Tony.

She was laughing softly. "I thought the mention of marriage would scare you. You've altered a lot, Tony."

"Since I met you?"

"No; from the report I had of you."

"As we mature," said Tony, "our views alter. When we are seventeen we are convinced we know all there is to be known. When we are twenty-one, we know that we were wrong about many things at seventeen, but that we're right now. At thirty, our eyes are once more opened to our past folly, but we suffer the same hallucination with regard to the present. A man is

beginning to know how to enjoy life when he has to part with it. That's one of life's little ironies. Like giving a poor man a fortune on his death-bed. Life's like that. It gives you a smack in the eye when you're expecting a smile and a kind word. It reminds me, sometimes, of the gentler sex. They both act the way you least anticipate."

"That's what makes them so attractive," said Denise. "We'd lose interest in to-morrow if we knew what was coming. But I wonder who the kind friend was who locked us in?"

"Heaven knows," said Tony. He himself strongly suspected George; but he saw no reason why Denise would know that. Tony believed that the less a woman knew, the happier she was, because there was more for her to find out.

"I suppose," said Denise scornfully, "they thought we'd flirt."

Tony started. This was perilously near the truth. Women, he reflected, had bad minds. Even charming girls like Denise. But they weren't bad enough to keep tag on men. They couldn't be. The men went one better every time.

"That reminds me of the story of the Two Fairies," said Tony, who was an ingenious and fertile-minded liar.

"H'm!" said Denise; which wasn't very encouraging.

"Once upon a time," said Tony, "there was a Good

Fairy and a Bad Fairy. The Good Fairy went about doing good, and the Bad Fairy went about having a good time.

"At the end of the year, when the Fairies have to account for their deeds to the Queen, the Good Fairy said she'd cured the Farmer's sick cow. The Queen said yes, that was so; but the cow, immediately on recovery, had kicked the Farmer through the wall of his own barn.

"Then the Good Fairy said she'd made the Poor Fisherman into a Prince. And the Queen said yes, that was so; but the Prince, in the manner of the new-rich, was abusing his power and leading his subjects a dog's life.

"Then the Good Fairy said she'd made the Old Grandmother relent, and let the Rich Girl marry her Social Inferior. And the Queen said yes, that was so; but the Rich Girl now wished she hadn't married her Social Inferior, and the Social Inferior wished the same.

"So the Queen said the Good Fairy hadn't really done any good at all, though her intentions had been of the best, but just made a lot of trouble through meddling with other people's affairs.

"Then the Bad Fairy came up and said she'd done nothing through the whole year but enjoy herself. And the Queen said that that was all right, because in being happy she'd made others happy, and that was what every Fairy was meant to do."

"Is there a moral to that?" said Denise.

"There was at the beginning," said Tony; "but it seems to have vanished. I meant to point out in the manner allegorical that those who interfere with what doesn't concern them are sniffing around for trouble. This world," said Tony, "is made up of two sorts of people, those who mind their own business, and those who write letters to the newspapers. To this latter category belong spinsters, small-town politicians, retired officers of the Indian service, and——"

"Mr. Selwyn," said Denise demurely.

Tony glanced at her with faint disapproval. "No man is an inveterate letter-writer because he has committed that ghastly blunder once. A little toleration, sister Denise, is indicated. A man may slip and pick himself up again with no more than a hasty word jerked from him by his own foolishness in treading dangerous ground. We are," said Tony, "all for toleration. Toleration in everything. If Mr. Smith considers trousers should be worn without a turn-up, let him wear his so by all means. He is a sartorial horror; but what of that? He goes clothed in his own self-satisfaction.

"If Mr. Jones eats peas with his knife, helped out now and then by his fingers, doubtless he knows best what agrees with him, and has a grand, fine, careless contempt for those gibbering kelpies on the average man's bed-post, the conventions.

"If Mr. Brown bows down before the sun, moon, and stars, we see no reason either to question the

sincerity of his beliefs or to cast doubts upon his chances of felicity in the world to come. We Waynes," said Tony, "are broad-minded. With everyone we are inside, looking out. In this respect we might almost be considered superhuman."

"Don't you talk wonderfully!" said Denise in admiration.

"Do I bore you?"

"No," said Denise, "I like to hear you talk. You remind me of a mothers' meeting, only you've no competition. And, besides, I know you're doing it just to keep my mind off spooks and things."

"Ah!" said Tony. He purred with gratification. He'd been talking just because he liked to talk; but if Denise chose to read him otherwise, that was all to the good. "I don't deny it," said Tony modestly. "We must do our good deed for the day." He slipped an arm about her slim waist. "You don't feel nervous?"

"Not in the least," said Denise. "But it's chilly down here, isn't it?"

Tony removed his coat and put it about her shoulders. She protested; he insisted; she desisted. "But aren't you afraid of catching cold?"

"We Waynes," said Tony, "are hard-boiled. We are tough eggs. We fear nothing that walks, swims, flies, or glides. Such as men, fish, birds, or ghosts. We look Death in the eye, and tell him he's wearing well. Besides, we wear Kosy Knitted Knunderwear, which amply protects us from all chills, colds, throat or

bronchial troubles, draughts, lumbago, sciatica, and rheumatic arthritis."

"You don't?" said Denise in faint horror.

"No," Tony admitted. "We do not. But we feel as if we did. And a man's as cold as he feels. Have no fear. A series of hardships, endured since earliest maturity, has toughened the Wayne tissues to the consistency of Hadfield's nickel-chrome steel. Through history we Waynes have been noted for our toughness. We have been executed, murdered, blown up, drowned, burned alive, buried alive, eaten by cannibals, skinned alive, and poisoned. We have died of thirst, hunger, heat, cold, over-drinking, over-eating, hydrophobia, and gout. And still we survive. And, I repeat, still we survive. Nothing can daunt us, nothing can haunt us. We are, in a manner of speaking, ready for anything. We will try anything once, and, if we like it, again. It has been so ever since the first of the Waynes beat his chosen bride senseless with a club and bore her off to his cave, there to found that line of fair women and brave men which, so far from leaving only a single footprint in the Sands of Time, churned up the whole beach."

Denise chuckled. She had a soft, throaty chuckle that sounded well in Tony's ear. He disliked females with either the loud, brazen ha-ha or the silvery tinkle. Very few women, he thought, had a sense of humour worth mentioning. Still fewer had a keen enough appreciation of the humorous to throw back their heads

and laugh like a hyena. Women didn't attach a great enough importance to the Joke as a factor in the scheme of things. They ranked it below Fashion, and Domestic Economy, and things like that. Whereas . . .

"Tony," said Denise.

"Yes?" said Tony.

"Would you like to hear a good joke?"

"If there's anything I'd like to hear better than a good joke," said Tony, "it's two good jokes."

Denise chuckled again. A sudden desire had overcome her, an irresistible impulse to tell Tony she wasn't the American heiress she pretended to be, but only a mannequin in Trent's Mammoth Store, and see what he'd say about it. If he didn't appreciate the humour of it, well, that was his own fault.

"Once upon a time," she began, "there was a young and innocent girl who worked for a living in a large shop in a certain town. And her boss saw her and fell in love with her."

"I know," said Tony. "She was a mannequin."

Denise gasped. "How did you know?"

"George told me. Am I right?"

"Yes," said Denise faintly.

"It seems," said Tony, "our young friend wrote letters of an impassioned description to this designing female, and she clung closer to them than one of your own countrymen clings to his chewing-gum. George sniffs blackmail in the offing. But," said Tony, "per-

haps I should not have told you this?" He peered at her as closely as was possible in the gloom. "Has the Wayne discretion been caught napping? Or did you know all?"

"I knew all," said Denise.

"Ah!" Tony sighed his relief. "There are many strange aspects about the case, not the least bewildering of which, my dear Watson, is the fact that this young but not-too-innocent maiden returned George's presents."

Denise bit her lips to stem the flood of righteous indignation that brought the roses to her lily cheeks. Tony, then, had no idea as to her real identity. There was more in this than met the eye. Much more. George, Denise decided, was up to no good. He had something on his mind. There were several things she'd like to do to George. A description of them would have read like a page from Old Moore's Almanack.

"In all my life," said Tony, "I have never offered a present to a girl. Not since I reached the age of twenty-one, at least. And therefore, admittedly, my experience in the matter is slight. But I venture to say that few girls in the position this girl was in would send back George's presents. Eh, Watson?"

"Perhaps she didn't want them," Denise suggested in a choking voice.

"It may be as you say," Tony admitted. "In which case we can only deduce that the presents were not all

that might be desired. The male's choice in these things," said Tony, "does not always agree with the female's. What George might consider a snappy pair of gloves, this girl might shun with loathing. A diamond tiara that to George might appear almost as something mother made, might cause this girl to yelp sharply and cover her eyes. I could offer you a million similar examples."

"Don't," said Denise.

"On the other hand," said Tony, "this attitude might be no more than a well-considered and crafty policy. She sends back George's presents to prove he means nothing in her young life. As a consequence, George's emotion, be it love or passion, strains still more heavily at the bonds imposed upon it by civilization and the Metropolitan Police Force. George is convinced that never before in the history of the world was there a love like this. The love of Dante for his Beatrice was a mere infatuation beside George's pash for this young, and, to all accounts, not uncomely woman. Romeo, in the argot of your country, had nothing on George. Leander lacked George's punch. George was the great lover of all time. He said so on the most expensive notepaper he could buy. And these fond sheets our damsel seems to consider as good as so many blank cheques. She may," said Tony, "be right; and she may be wrong. Who am I to say?" he concluded modestly.

"Do . . . do any of the others know about this?"

Denise asked. She lisped the question, for she still bit her lip, as the roses of virtuous indignation still mingled with the lilies of her cheeks.

Tony shook his head. "George gave me the impression that this was the secret of his life. I hesitate to believe that he would spread the glad news about. But who can fathom the mind of man? Especially of a man like George. Or has he a mind? Or don't you think so? Had he Learned to Concentrate in Six Lessons by Post? Does he Know what he Wants? Does he wish the world to know that a mannequin in his store is about to come down on him with both feet for money with which to soothe a sorely-wounded pride? I," said Tony, "doubt it. George is a shy, retiring violet. He shuns the baleful glare of publicity. A reporter he regards as his natural enemy. He told me of his plight merely because he wanted my advice."

"He didn't tell me much," said Denise; which was perfectly true. "Did he mention her name at all?"

"Not once," said Tony. "Probably it is Hanna Bloggs, or something of a like endearing nature."

"Yes," said Denise absently. "Men were deceivers ever."

"You don't say so?" said Tony. "And what about women?"

"Women are just beginning to wake up." Here, Denise judged the entire sisterhood by herself. "Some of these days they're going to give the men a nasty jolt." There, also, she judged others by herself. She

meant to give George a nasty jolt. Or, preferably, a succession of nasty jolts. She meant to make his life something Dante had, through a grievous oversight, neglected to include in his masterpiece. Suspected her of blackmail, did he? The poor gink! He'd suspect her of worse than blackmail before she was through. And a few short weeks ago he had panted "Be mine!" at her knee.

Denise laughed coldly. Probably he wished to pant the same at some other knee now. So far as she was concerned, he was at liberty to begin right away. But she wouldn't let him know that. He had as much sex-appeal for her as a slug; but she wouldn't let him know that, either. A little suspense might do him good. She laughed again, even more coldly, much as Torquemada might have laughed at the antics of one of his victims in the flames.

"The hour grows late," said Tony.

Denise started. "Do you think they'll leave us here all night?"

"No. Decidedly, no. And, even if they do, could we be in better company?"

"Yes. Decidedly, yes," said Denise coldly. "I know you're a perfect little gentleman, and all the rest of it; but I'd sooner be back in my comfy camp-bed, because this stone is cold, and people have nasty minds and nastier tongues, and what has a poor girl left when her reputation's gone?"

"Another reputation," said Tony. "Reputations are

indestructible. Take one away, and another comes in its place. Try to take away that, and you only add to it. They remind me of a dog I read of in my youth. The hero sliced off its head, and immediately it had two. And so on, until the hero decided he wasn't going about things in quite the right way, as the dog now had two hundred and fifty-six heads, each with six rows of thirty-two teeth. I forget how it ended. Looking back from the view-point of maturity, it seems to me the hero was up against it. I mean, he has to stop somewhere. And when he stopped—"Snap!" An uncomfortable predicament."

"Push your face up against that grating," Denise said, "and make a loud noise."

Tony pushed his face up against the grating and made a loud noise. When he paused for breath they heard a faint shout in reply.

"Dave," Tony said. He bellowed again.

The Rev. David's voice came more clearly. "Hello, hello, hello! What's all the fuss about? Found the treasure?"

"Come and let us out, you sarcastic devil!" Denise shrilled.

"Eh?" said the Rev. David. "Let you out? Where *are* you?"

"Tell him, Tony," Denise said faintly. "If I tried, I'd shock him."

"In the dungeons," Tony roared.

"Oh! Right! Be with you in half a jiffy."

They heard his steps on the stairs; the door swung open. "Somebody shut you in?" said the Rev. David.

"The rats," said Denise. She stalked past him, followed by Tony. "Where's George?"

"That I couldn't say," the Rev. David confessed. He glanced at Joan, who studiously looked upwards at the rectangle of moonlit sky at the head of the stair. "Joan and I have been searching for the treasure."

"H'm!" said Denise. She took Joan's arm, climbed the stairs with her. Tony and the Rev. David followed on behind.

In the courtyard they met George and Lady Pat. "Find anything?" George inquired heartily.

Denise fixed him with a glittering eye. But she said nothing.

"Bed calls with a loud and compelling voice," Tony yawned. "We were up betimes, even when Dawn's left hand was in the sky. Unfortunately, there wasn't a tavern handy."

Curiously dispirited, they trooped down towards the tents. The reaction had set in.

3

Tony awoke with a sense of something on his mind, as if he had eaten an unhealthily heavy supper. He had made a mental note of something the previous night. He groped about for it, like a man looking for a collar-stud in the dark.

Unlike the man looking for the collar-stud, he found what he sought. And he was right. He had been neglecting Lady Pat. And he had regarded Lady Pat as one of the most promising of his avenues of escape from a life of penury.

"This must now cease," Tony said.

If he is to be in any way successful, the man who cultivates at one and the same time the affections of three young women must have nerves of steel. Like the man in the powder magazine, he has to be careful what he does. Each movement has to be thought out beforehand, and thought out to the smallest detail. A slip, and where is he? Obviously, in the soup.

And nerves of steel are not alone sufficient. He must have a tongue of honey, and the imagination of an Edgar Allan Poe. In short, he must be an accomplished liar. He must be ready to clutch at opportunities.

Tony came to Lady Pat's side like a faithful hound as soon as breakfast was over. Her grey-green eyes widened a little, and the suspicion of a pucker marred the serenity of her brow. She had hardly spoken to Tony since the last night at Hawkscliff; she considered that he had avoided her. She was annoyed with Tony.

Tony knew it. Tony knew, too, that Hell holds no fury like a woman scorned. Not that he had scorned Lady Pat; but he suspected she thought he had.

Women were like that. You have to be running around them all the time, yelping excitedly, or they think you've lost interest in them. Tony hadn't lost

interest in Lady Pat. He was more interested in her than ever when he saw she was annoyed. He sat down facing her, and looked at her shyly. It was a bit of a strain; but he managed it.

"Hello, Pat." He said it in a wistful tone, as if he expected to be reproved.

If it is possible for a young woman of Lady Pat's social standing to do such a thing, she sniffed. Not an encouraging beginning.

"Well?" she inquired.

Tony wriggled ingratiatingly. "You're annoyed with me," he said.

Her brows rose like two of those lattice window-blinds pulled up by a string. "Annoyed with you? Why on earth should I be annoyed with you?"

"Search me," said Tony. "But there you are. Some sixth and inner sense tells me so."

"I think," said Lady Pat, "you've been avoiding me."

"A foul slander," said Tony. "I've been corralled, that's all. I've been driven in a what-do-you-call-it that elephants are driven into if they don't escape. I turn this way, and Joan leaps out on me like some fierce panther on the gentle-eyed gazelle. I turn that way, and Denise has me by the short hairs.

"Not," said Tony modestly, "that I wish to give you the impression of being more than ordinarily popular; but life here is so boring that the dear creatures seek what entertainment they can. Am I to blame? I ask you."

"I think you're a very tolerable liar, Tony," Lady Pat said with a little smile. "But if you want to kiss and be friends, I'm willing."

"Spoken like a man!" said Tony. "About this kissing, now. . . ."

"That," Lady Pat said coldly, "was a figure of speech."

Tony sighed. "I feared as much. Shall we immerse our bodies in the bounding billow?"

"There's nothing much else to do, is there?"

It was a beautiful day. Too beautiful a day, Tony thought, to waste in flirting. But he persevered, and without any too great an effort. This thing was like drink; it got a grip of you. Flirt a bit, and you wanted a bit more. Like a dog chasing his tail, there was no end to it. Until you flirted too much, and got married, Tony supposed. And even then you kept on flirting, though maybe not with the same girl.

It was a beautiful evening. Just the sort of evening, Tony thought, to spend flirting. There was something in the air that made him feel like a combination of Romeo and Don Juan and Rudolph Valentino.

Or perhaps it wasn't so much the air as Lady Pat. Those grey-green eyes of hers hinted at things unknown in the nursery. Tony sometimes felt a little out of his depth with her. He had an uneasy suspicion that she laughed at him. There were queer, short periods of silence when she looked at him as if he had been born a moment previously. And that is a most

irritating way to look at anybody.

When the moon came up it made the world a place where anything could happen. It reminded Tony of a stage moon. It had the same lopsided air, and the face on it wore the same expression of bilious superiority. It was an out-size in moons, having just reached the full. It ringed Hawkscliff Island about with a sea of gold. "Hawaii has nothing on that," said Tony. "All we want now is a canoe and a ukulele. I don't suppose the skiff would do?"

"And what about the ukulele?" said Lady Pat.

"One reposes peacefully in my tent."

"Do you—I mean, can you play it?"

"I have won medals," said Tony, proudly but untruthfully. "In America, where I first became proficient in the art, I am affectionately known as Ukulele Uriah—Uriah being my fifth and most popular name. Perhaps you would like a demonstration?"

Lady Pat nodded. "We'll get the others, and go for a cruise in the launch. It's not a canoe, and there are no palm-trees in the vicinity; but what does it matter, with a moon like that?"

The launch drifted out across the sea of gold, her engines barely turning. Tony squatted in the stern, ukulele in hand, Lady Pat beside him. George and Joan were in the wheel-house; Denise and the Rev. David a little for'ard. They had paired off, Tony said, like doves in the springtime.

"You flatter yourself," said Lady Pat. "Get busy with the uke."

Tony strummed a few soft chords. "What do you want?"

"Oh, anything."

"Something about the moon?" said Tony. "Song-writers would be a penurious lot if there wasn't a moon. Or blue-birds. They run each other pretty close; but I think the moon wins by a short head. Or something about hula-hula girls and tropic beaches?"

"Ask Denise," said Lady Pat. "No use being selfish. Remember the character of the reverend gentleman."

"Something nice and dreamy," said Denise. "A lullaby."

"I fear," said Tony, "my voice is not quite suited to lullabys. In fact, rather the reverse. But it has its virtues. Yes. At least, so my friends say; and my friends are my keenest critics. I'll sing to you," Tony said, "a little thing entitled 'My South Sea Sweetie'." He strummed gently on the ukulele, and raised a not unpleasant voice:

"Did you ever take a cruise,
To the Coo-Coo Isles,
When your wife's in the blues,
An' you're pinin' for smiles?
Did you ever go search,
For somethin' real hot?
You didn't? Young feller,
You been missin' a lot.

"Then," said Tony, "we proceed to the Coo-Coo Isles themselves, where we learn :

"The moon's always shinin',
An' there ain't no men in blue,
Nor anyone to wonder,
Who's walkin' out with you.
There ain't no wives nor widows,
For husband's aren't known,
They're just a lot of mammas,
Where the coco-nuts are grown.

"We are then," said Tony, "introduced to the heroine of this charming little ditty, and treated to a short but lucid description of her superficial attractions. As follows :

"My South Sea Sweetie,
I met her on the beach,
Her hair is black and kinky,
I tell you she's a peach.
Her skin is sort of chocolate,
An' she wears a little dress,
Made of beads an' bits of ribbon,
That don't leave you much to guess.
You can hunt the breezy pampas,
Or the torrid zone below,
But if you want red-hot mammas,
To the Coo-Coo Isles you go.

"I might," said Tony, "add a footnote to the effect that a red-hot mamma is a member of the gentle sex who has little or no regard for the conventions."

"You might add a footnote to the effect of another song," said Lady Pat. "Your voice isn't quite so abhorrent as I expected."

"My repertoire," Tony apologized, "is slight to the point of emaciation. And songs suitable to this select gathering are as difficult to find as the wave in a bald man's hair. However, we Waynes have always been noted for our bulldog tenacity. We do not know when we are beaten. The following is an eye-witness's account of a storm in the cotton fields of Alabama.

"Way down South in de cotton fields,
See de pickaninnies, white an' brown,
See de pickaninnies, runnin' in de cotton,
Way down South where de cotton am grown.

"You gather," said Tony, "that the scene of action, so to speak is, as I said, in the cotton fields.

"See de pickaninnies, brown an' white,
See de black cloud blottin' out de sun.
See de black cloud blottin' out de light,
Way down South where de cotton am grown.

"See de rain-drops, fallin' like silver,
Wettin' de pickaninnies, white an' brown.
See de rain-drops, fallin' like silver,
Way down South where de cotton am grown.

"See de rain-drops, fallin' thick an' thicker,
See de pickaninnies runnin' from de storm.
See de river rise, quick and quicker,
Way down South where de cotton am grown.

THE LIGHT LOVER

"See de river-bank crumble an' crumble,
Hear de mammies, white an' black, moan.
Hear de river-waves rumble an' rumble,
Way down South where de cotton am grown.

"See de silver in among de cotton,
See de silver spreadin' roun' an' roun'.
See de silver, lappin' roun' de barn,
Way down South where de cotton am grown.

"Hear de pickaninnies holler an' holler,
At de silver comin' in de door.
Hear de pickaninnies holler an' holler,
At de silver creepin' 'cross de floor.

"See de black cloud slide off from de sun,
See de silver sink into de groun'.
See de pickaninnies come out one by one,
Way down South where de cotton am grown.

"See de river, runnin' to de sea,
Soft an' gentle, runnin' down an' down.
Hear de river-song, like a lazy bee,
Way down South where de cotton am grown.

"That," said Tony, "is, ladies and gentlemen, that."
"That was perfectly lovely," said Denise. "Give us some more, Tony."

Tony cocked an eye at her. "In all good faith?"
She nodded. "I mean it."

"Do," said Lady Pat. "It reminds me of when I was a V.A.D., and we had those pull-out beds."

"Let me think," said Tony. "A nautical shanty, perhaps? Yes? No?"

"Yes," said Denise eagerly. Lady Pat nodded, and squeezed his hand. The Rev. David murmured approval. He was, he said, strong for nautical shanties.

"So long as they're not too naughty?" said Lady Pat. "However, that's unpardonable. Go on, Tony."

"In the days of the China clippers," Tony said, "the old shellbacks sang these songs to scare away evil spirits, such as inferior rum, rum being their staple diet. They were," said Tony, "called shellbacks because of their resemblance to the common turtle, which also is ugly, lazy, and of deplorable moral character. All that, however, is beside the point, as the monkey is reported to have said on cutting himself on the edge of a knife. To proceed:

"Oh, who would be a sailor,
A sailor fine and free;
And live on rum and salted pork,
Just like you and me?"

"With a wink and a nod for the belles of Spain,
With a hug and a kiss when we come again,
With a house on the hill if we wish to remain.

Chorus.

"Our pockets lined with silver and gold,
Gold for the women, young and old,
To help them love the sailor bold.

THE LIGHT LOVER

Chorus.

"With a knife in our belt and a face of leather,
Ready for love and the stormy weather,
Ready for aught, to the end of our tether.

Chorus.

"With a wife in Cadiz and another at home,
With a sweetheart wherever our fancies roam,
With a laugh as we glide away on the foam.

Chorus.

"With a blow and a curse from the driver mate,
With a nightmare of toil, early and late,
Wearily watching the winds abate.

"Oh, who would be a sailor,
A sailor fine and free;
And live on rum and salted pork,
Just like you and me?

"These things," said the Rev. David, when the applause had subsided, "are so romantic. They make one think of the old free days, when men were men, and lived——"

"On dog-biscuits," said Tony politely. "Quite."

"And lived like men," said the Rev. David. "When the shortest voyage was an adventure, and the rounding of the Horn took from three to six months. There were so many opportunities of romance in those days. . . ."

"And such a variety," Tony agreed.

The Rev. David regarded him with suspicion. "As you say, such a variety. They knew the ports of the Old World and the New. They knew the ports of Spain, and of the Mediterranean. They knew of the Gold Coast, and the Ivory Coast, and the Slave Coast; they were at home in Rio and the South American ports. . . ."

"Quite at home," said Lady Pat wickedly.

"In short," said the Rev. David, "they had an infinitely greater chance of living romantically than has the sailor of to-day."

"And a correspondingly greater chance of dying unpleasantly," said Tony. "They could pass out on a Spanish stiletto, like a wrinkle on a pin. They could be garrotted. . . ."

"You talk too much," said Lady Pat. "Sing."

"My song is sung," said Tony. "My swansong rings in your ears." He stood up, lifted Lady Pat to her feet. "Let us do our good deed for the day, and relieve George at the wheel. He pines for the open air."

George seemed in no way anxious to be relieved at the wheel. He said so in loud, aggrieved tones. But Tony would take no refusal. He said so in gentle but firm tones. "We will take no refusal," said Tony. "None. In here, you gasp like some finny monster of the deep deprived of his evening Guinness. You pine for the open spaces like some caged lion for his native

heath. We," said Tony, gently taking the wheel from George, and shouldering him away, "will relieve you. Do not thank me."

"I won't," said George.

"Don't," said Tony. "We wish for none."

"You're not getting any."

"That is as we would have it, friend of our boyhood."

"Better turn back for the island," George said, grinding his teeth with a sound like a patent knife-sharpener.

Tony swung the wheel until the launch pointed towards the dim bulk of the island. "It is done. Good-bye."

They heard the sound of George's grinding teeth long after he had gone. Tony said it sounded like a worn bearing somewhere in the engines. But after a while it died away.

"Peace . . ." Tony said, slipping an arm about Lady Pat's waist. Lady Pat had a waist that seemed specially designed for the purpose. She yielded softly to his clasp. Her head was on his shoulder; the moonlight, striking through the glass roof, made her face pale as a face of ivory, beautiful as a lily. Tony told her so, in a speech lasting a little over ten minutes.

"Am I to believe all that?" Lady Pat said gently, when he had finished. "Or is it merely a sort of prologue, leading to better and higher things, like the

Ladder of Success we see at the backs of most popular magazines?"

"As to that," said Tony, "please yourself. Most of it is the overflow of a boyish heart."

"I'm a strong swimmer, Tony. And the rest?"

"Poet's license," said Tony. "The triumph of the artistic temperament over truth."

Lady Pat pouted. She did it, Tony considered, very well. So well that he was inclined to believe she had practised it before a mirror. He was given to thoughts like that.

"You're not very flattering, are you, Tony?"

"Does the rose need flattery? Or," said Tony, "the violet?"

"Or," said Lady Pat, "the cabbage?"

"You want the naked truth?" said Tony, leaning over her.

"Well, in its night-shirt, anyway."

Tony kissed her full on the lips.

"Is that your answer?" said Lady Pat, drawing a deep breath.

"Do you want another?"

"No; but I'll give you mine." She kissed him full on the lips, her soft white arms about his neck.

Tony abandoned the wheel. He had something better to hold.

"Do you do this sort of thing often?" said Lady Pat.

"Do I do it well?"

Lady Pat looked innocent. "How should I know?"

"Doubtless," said Tony, "as time goes on we shall improve our technique. There is more in this than meets the casual eye of the determined celibate."

"Such as yourself?"

"Not so," said Tony.

"I thought——"

"As a man matures, his views change. Not so long ago," Tony confessed, "we looked upon a wife as something that could be done without, like the appendix, or Kosy Knitted Knunderwear. Most men had one or two; but they regretted it. We saw no reason why we should add ourselves to the number."

"And you've changed?"

"Yes. Now we think differently. We perceive our duty to the nation."

"Whazzat?" said Lady Pat. "Come again."

"Our duty to the nation," said Tony firmly. "The noble name of Wayne must go down to future generations."

"Why should it?"

"Well, it's as good as any other, isn't it?"

"It's tolerable."

"It is more than tolerable," said Tony. "It has Historic Associations."

"You seem very proud of it."

"And why not?" said Tony. "Once I looked up the family tree. I found it not so much a tree as a cactus. One of the Wayne ancestors was the victim of

a Gretna Green marriage. Another was hanged at Tilbury for piracy. Still another was buried at a cross-roads with a stake through his middle. We have much to boast of, we Waynes."

"And you're the last?" said Lady Pat.

"I," said Tony, "am the last." He waved one hand.

"But there will be others."

"Oh!" said Lady Pat. "You're going to marry?"

"That is our intention."

"When?"

"Now."

"Now?"

"It is now our intention," said Tony carefully.

"When the actual ceremony will take place is difficult to say."

"Have you proposed yet?"

"No."

"When are you going to?"

"Soon."

"Soon?"

"Very soon."

"How soon?"

Tony looked down at her as she rested in his arms.

"Very soon indeed. There comes a time to every man when the incidents of his past life float before his mind, when his tongue feels like a parrot's, and things swim before his vision. . . ."

"The morning after," Lady Pat interpreted gently.

"You mistake. The moment when he lays his love

at the feet of a girl, and with a shy but loving smile she murmurs 'Yes'. Then," said Tony, "he knows that life is worth the living, because the poor gink can't see what this impulsive moment is going to cost him later on. If only he could," said Tony, "how many a man now strangling in the grip of marriage would still breathe the pure, sweet air of bachelorhood."

"How many?" said Lady Pat curiously.

"Very many," said Tony. "Very, very, very many."

"For a man who's going to propose so soon," said Lady Pat, "you talk wildly."

"Put that down to the last dying struggles of my freedom," said Tony. "Lady Pat, I have something to ask you."

"Yes?" said Lady Pat. She knew well enough what he had to ask her. And she meant to accept. She was not in love with Tony; but she liked him very much, and his sense of humour appealed to her. They would, she considered, struggle along tolerably well together. Now and then a hard word might pass between them, or a definition of character entirely without charity, but these little things were to be expected, and helped break the monotony of life. She laughed at life, and so did Tony. That was the great bond between them.

"It is," said Tony, "a very short question, yet difficult to put into words."

"Try," said Lady Pat encouragingly. "You never know what you can do until you try."

"Well . . ." said Tony.

"Yes?" said Lady Pat.

"Do you, or do you not," said Tony, "know where our friend the cleric keeps that letter he wrote to the papers about Joan?"

Lady Pat started a little. "No," she said in a very faint voice. "No!"

"I feared as much," said Tony. "Friend Selwyn, when a thought comes to him, keeps it to himself."

Lady Pat recovered swiftly. "He's so dumb," she said, "he thinks Robin Hood's real name is Douglas Fairbanks."

"Forget him," said Tony. "He just popped into my mind for the moment. There is something else I want to ask you, Lady Pat." He moved her slightly, so that he could watch her face. "It may seem sudden. . . ."

"Yes?" said Lady Pat again. "Spit it out."

"Will you—" said Tony. "What the blazes?"

With a long, grinding thud, the launch came to a halt. Tony was thrown across the cabin, Lady Pat in his arms. He gathered her together, shut off the engines. "Hurt?"

"Do I look it?"

"No," said Tony. "But I feared . . ."

George appeared in the doorway. He pointed for'ard and made incoherent noises.

"Yes?" said Tony, interestedly. "Doubtless you mean something."

"You . . . you idiot!" George hissed. "You've run us aground!"

"I *knew* something had happened," said Tony.

4

"A Red Indian on the warpath," said Tony under his breath, "has nothing on the last of the Waynes. Bill the Blackfoot, or his cousin Archibald the Apache, not to mention Harry the Huron, would turn a coppery green with envy were they able to witness this performance." He stubbed his toe against the root of a tree, and swore softly. "George should have this place cleaned up. How the devil can he expect a man to steal noiselessly through it at dead of night when he leaves things like that lying around?"

The place Tony referred to was the wood surrounding Hawkscliff House. It was, as he said, dead of night, though outside the wood the moon showed things up a little too clearly for his taste. Nefarious expeditions such as this needed darkness.

The trees thinned before him, and he saw the house. It lay dark and silent in the silver radiance of the moon. Tony nodded his approval. That was as it should be. That, he told himself, was as the Confraternity of Burglars would have it. The moon was a bit of a

curse, though. The C. of B. should do something about it.

Stealthily skirting the lawns, he came to where the rose-garden debouched upon the woods. He slipped across the intervening space, tried the gate in the hedge, and found it locked.

"Some people are damn' suspicious," said Tony. "They think their blessed roses are in danger. It makes me tired." But he didn't seem tired as he vaulted the gate.

The rose-garden, reasonably enough, was filled with rose-bushes. They made blots of shadow across the winding path. Tony slipped like a shadow from shadow to shadow. "A suspicious character," he said, "answering to the name of Wayne, was found wandering about the grounds of Hawkscliff in the small hours of the morning. When interrogated, he is said to have stated that he was looking for romance. The absurdity of this immediately struck the magistrate, and he roared with laughter previous to sentencing the man to six months' hard labour."

He was on the terrace, in the shadow of the house. There was no cover here, other than that afforded by a few statues of Diana and sister goddesses scantily attired. "Dian," said Tony, "you must be cold." He slipped his coat off, hung it about her marble shoulders. "Sorry I can't spare anything more."

He scanned the ivy-clad walls, and the windows like blank eyes staring down at him. Which was his room?

He found it hard to say. But it didn't much matter, as they were all empty, and once in the corridors he could find his way about.

"The great fault of our burglars," said Tony to himself, scrambling up the ivy, "is that they go too furtively about their job. They give the casual onlooker an impression of nervousness. That is not as it should be. No man need be ashamed of his profession."

He reached the window-sill, sat on it, tried the window at his leisure. It was fastened.

"This is very annoying," said Tony. "Why are people so suspicious of the motives of others? This breeds bad blood." He opened his knife, thrust the blade between the sash of the upper and lower pane, and forced back the catch. "And their precautions are so futile." He opened the window, slipped into the room, and gently closed the window. "Splendid, splendid!"

A pencil of light leaped from his hand, showed him the room in which he stood. He had borrowed Denise's torch, telling her he wanted to look for creepy-crawly things in his pyjamas.

"Where are we now?" said Tony. "Obviously, where we should not be; in a maiden's bedchamber. However, as the maiden herself is missing from the scene the crime loses much of its repulsiveness. But this is no place for the last of the Waynes." He slid into the corridor.

There was something white in the corridor. Something white and bulky and large, with eyes of green flame. "Shades of Cæsar!" said Tony in a whisper. "Somebody's lost white elephant!" He turned the beam of the little torch on the animal. It resolved itself into Bill the Bulldog, yawning prodigiously. He came to the snap of Tony's fingers, and twisted himself into a dozen different shapes in an effort to express his pleasure at this reunion.

"Quiet!" Tony hissed. "Calm down, you lump of blubber, or I'll boot you in the slats. Have you forgotten our first meeting? I'll bet you haven't. That was nothing to what'll happen right now unless you curb your emotions."

Bill the Bulldog seemed to take this to heart. Repressing his exuberance, he slunk along at Tony's heels with no more than a deep and prolonged sniff now and then to betray his interest in the proceedings.

Tony, now, had his bearings. He knew where he was. He moved along the corridor until he came to the Rev. David's room. The door opened for him with a faint creak.

"This is very satisfactory," Tony murmured. "Eh, Bill?"

He flashed his torch about the room, found the wardrobe, and painstakingly went through the pockets of the garments it held. In vain. The Rev. David's letter to the Press reposed in none of them.

"The man," said Tony, "has a mind like a corkscrew. Now where can the damn' thing be?"

He searched the Rev. David's suitcases with an eagle-eye, and a like result.

"I suppose," said Tony aggrievedly, "he has it hidden somewhere, tied up with blue ribbon, like Cleo's cammy. Well, patience and perseverance have wrought wonders before this. Consider the case of . . . Ah!"

He had it. He knew he had it, even before he read the first couple of lines. The Rev. David had hidden it cunningly in a drawer of the dressing-table, and covered it with handkerchiefs and a tie or two. "But," said Tony with some complacency, "it takes more than handkerchiefs and a tie or two to put a Wayne off the scent. You hear me, Bill?"

Bill apparently heard something else as well. He pushed his nose against the bottom of the door and sniffed, making a noise like a locomotive. Then, very softly, he growled.

"H'sh" said Tony in a whisper. "Quiet, you beef-eater!"

There were steps in the corridor outside. Light furtive steps, with long pauses between. They reached the door, halted a moment, went on. Tony drew a long breath.

"We must look into this, Bill, as Bluebeard's wives are reported to have said in a moment of thoughtlessness."

Tony opened the door. He saw, dimly, the figure of a man a few yards away. Then the man, with a low, muttered oath, ran at him.

"Ah, ha!" said Tony, side-stepping. "Oh, ho!" He put out one foot, and his aggressor came down with a thud. Tony promptly fell on him, hit his head on the floor, and sat on his neck. "As neat a bit of work," said Tony, "as any I've done. The last of the Waynes collars Bertram the Burglar, and saves his friend's E.P.N.S. Don't bite him when he's down, Bill."

"You . . . you . . ." said the burglar in muffled tones.

"I seem to know that voice," said Tony. "Is it possible that we have met before?" He flashed the light in the face of his victim. "Well, well!" he said, standing up. "This is indeed an unexpected pleasure."

"I'd like to know," said George in a voice of unnatural calm, "what the blazes you're doing here at this hour."

"There are things we all would like to know," said Tony. "What is going to win the Gold Cup, for instance. There, friend of my boyhood, is a question exercising many minds about this season, among them, mine. Do you happen to hold any strong views on the matter?"

"I happen to hold some strong views on *this* matter," said George throatily. "What are you doing in my house at this time?"

"You forget," said Tony with dignity, "you are talking to a guest."

"Guest be jiggered!" George snarled. "I . . ."

"H'sh!" said Tony.

Sounds of movement came from the lower regions of the house. They saw a glow of light about the foot of the stairs, and the stout figure of Gregg, the butler, lamp in one hand and shot-gun in the other.

"In here," Tony said, opening a door and pulling George inside. "You can say what you want to say later on."

"About 'ere, it sounded," said the voice of Gregg. "I 'opes I don't 'ave to shoot, because the blood'll spoil the carpet. Who's there? Come out of it before I fire."

"It's that there blessed dorg," said another voice. "He musta been chasin' a rat, or somethin'."

"You know as well as I do, Simpkins," said Gregg severely, "there ain't no rats 'ere." But he seemed satisfied with the explanation. "Some of these days," he said reflectively, "I'm goin' to kick that dorg from the third landin' into the 'all, straight. We 'aven't 'ad a wink of sleep since 'e came." His voice, and the voices of the troop that followed him, died to a whisper of sound. Once more Hawkscliff slept.

"Come on," said George shortly. "We might as well get out of this. I suppose you got in by a window?"

"Correct, Sherlock," said Tony. "How you guessed it, with the doors locked, is beyond me."

"Can it," said George. He was in no mood for pleasantries.

They stole forth into the corridor, made their cautious way to the window at the end.

"Wait here a minute," said George abruptly. "I've forgotten something."

"Ah, ha!" said Tony, taking him firmly by the arm. "We part no more to-night, little one, we part no more to-night. The stars are big and bright, little one, the stars are big and bright. Just you and I together here, we'll never mind the weather, dear. We part no more to-night, little one, we part no more to-night."

"What the devil d'you mean?" George demanded.

"What I say," said Tony, opening the window. "Some deep plot is afoot, and you don't leave me until I know what it is."

"Maybe," said George. "But I'd like to know what brought *you* here."

"All in good time," said Tony placidly. "All in good time."

"And you mean to say you'll prevent me from going where I please in my own house?"

"Nothing so crude," said Tony. "We Waynes are subtle. I shall merely accompany you, and watch your movements with interest."

"Why on earth," George wailed, "did I ask you

down? I've had nothing but trouble since you came, you and that blessed cousin of mine."

"Why, oh why?" said Tony.

"You," said George, "do everything you can to annoy me, and he hangs around like a side of bacon. It's a little hard, when a fellow's trying to get a bit of rest after . . ."

"After prying loose another million from the British Public," said Tony. "Cheer up; things might be worse. I," said Tony, "might have determined to marry Joan."

George snorted. "Does that mean you haven't?"

"Nothing of the sort. Merely that I haven't definitely decided between her and Lady Pat."

"And what about Denise? You seem to be forgetting she's all dough, like a home-made cake."

"There," Tony admitted, "you have me. What about her?"

"Oh, come on!" said George impatiently, clambering through the window. "We'd better be getting back. How did you come over, by the way?"

"In the second dinghy," said Tony. "And you?"

"In the launch."

"In that case," said Tony pleasantly, "we will return together."

George gave him a sour look, and secured a stranglehold on the ivy. It bore his weight, and he went down slowly. Tony followed, and retrieved his coat from the marble shoulders of the divine huntress, who stared

out across the lawns with an expression of ineffable contempt. Tony slapped her familiarly on the back. "Cheer up, Dian. George'll buy you a hubby some of these days. Won't you, George?"

"Don't be an ass," said George shortly. "Come on."

They went back through the silent woods, down the cliff path, and across the placid stretch of sea.

"Quietly, now," said George, "or we'll wake them, and they'll want to know where we've been, and for what."

In silence they approached the camp. The clearing lay before them when Tony gripped George's arm.

"Down!" he hissed. "Somebody moving."

They crouched among the undergrowth, watching that stealthy figure in the shadows under the trees.

"Who is it?" whispered George.

"Search me."

"Two of 'em," said George.

Tony grunted. A second figure had joined the first.

"I think . . ." said George.

"So do I," said Tony.

"It is!" said George.

"You've said a mouthful, brother," agreed Tony. "It is."

It was.

Bill and Jem, with true British tenacity, had returned. Foiled once, they tried again. They knew nothing of Bruce, and little of spiders; but they worked

on the same principle as both. They returned with sacks and a determination to bring everything they could carry. Yet they were made to realize, as the minutes slipped by, that, however blue our skies are, we never really get what we want.

"I don't see none o' them drinks," said Bill.

"No more do I," said Jem.

"The berloody ol' liar!" said Bill indignantly.

"Ar," said Jem.

"Get that there leg o' mutton."

"I got it."

"Wot's them?"

"Kikes."

"Ain't no more meat, is there? Bring 'em, then. I ain't no kike-eater, but they's better nor bread."

"Ar," said Jem.

"You *sure* there ain't no drinks?"

"Ar," said Jem.

"The berloody ol' liar!"

"Berloody ol' liar is right," said Jem with a touch of originality.

"Gimme that 'am; I can manage it better nor you. An' mind where you're puttin' yer big feet. Got everythin', ain't we?"

"Ar," said Jem.

"C'm'on, then."

"Let them go," said George softly. "We've had about enough of this place, haven't we? This'll persuade the mater she's backed a loser."

"Quite," said Tony.

The laden figures of Bill and Jem vanished wraith-like into the shadows.

The Rev. David started up on one elbow as Tony entered his tent.

"Ah, it's you, Wayne. I thought I heard voices outside."

"You did," said Tony. "You did. I spoke to the stars."

"It sounded more like George," said the Rev. David. "But, do you know, I discovered an extraordinary thing to-day."

"You astonish me," said Tony.

"This Brooks girl . . ."

"Yes?" said Tony interestedly.

"She's an impostor."

"An impostor?"

"She thinks," said the Rev. David, "Chicago is in Alabama."

"And it's not?" said Tony. "Are you sure?"

"Quite," said the Rev. David. "Doesn't that strike you as being fishy, when she's supposed to come from Chicago?"

"Not in the least," said Tony. "If you knew anything about the American system of education, you'd realize it's only natural."

"I believe she is an impostor," said the Rev. David firmly. "She pretends to be a Chicagoan heiress in order to marry George."

"Why," said Tony reasonably, "should she want to marry George? I ask you."

"Because he is so wealthy, of course."

"There's that, I admit," said Tony. "I had forgotten it."

The Rev. David grunted, and turned over on his side. "I mentioned it to George, and he was most rude about it. This is confidential, of course."

"Quite," said Tony, taking off his trousers. "But I think you're mistaken."

"Mistaken? How?"

"She's not going to marry George."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because," said Tony, "she's going to marry me. And I doubt if she'll commit bigamy."

CHAPTER SIX

I

"MAN," said Tony reflectively, "is a wonderful creature."

Joan treated him to a sidelong glance of her deep grey eyes. "Thinking of yourself again, Tony?"

Tony admitted it. "Merely as a subject. We try something, and fail. What do we do? I ask you, Joan. We try again, and again fail. What do we do then?"

"Get someone else to do it for us," said Joan.

"Wrong," said Tony. "We try again, and succeed."

"You're all wrong," said Joan. "You've been reading Success articles. In real life, when we try something and fail, we say a few short but bitter words, and chuck it there."

"Not those of us," said Tony, "who have Developed their Personality in Six Short Lessons by Post. As, it seems, had Bill and Jem."

"Bill and Jem?" Joan repeated vaguely.

Tony nodded. "Who, foiled once, returned a second time, and succeeded."

Joan clutched at his arm, laughter dancing in her eyes. "You mean——"

"Just that," said Tony. "To them, and none other,

we owe our timely release from Hawkscliff Island."

Joan laughed softly. "How do you know, Tony?"

"Saw 'em."

"And you didn't stop them?"

"Right first time. We didn't."

"We?"

"George and I."

"What time was this?"

"I should say," said Tony carefully, "about twenty minutes to five ack emma."

"And what were you doing out of your little cot at that hour?"

"Wasn't there," said Tony, "or wasn't there, some old Arab who compared a woman's curiosity to a bottomless well? If there wasn't, there should have been. Because that's what it's like."

"Aren't you going to tell me?" said Joan pleadingly.

"Well," said Tony, "it's no secret. We were visiting the family seat of the Trents."

"Here?"

"Here."

"Why?"

"Why not?"

"I mean, at that hour. . . ."

"Dead of night," said Tony gravely.

"Was it," said Joan eagerly, "the letter?"

"It was."

"Did you get it?"

"I did."

"But George . . ."

"George," said Tony, "was engaged on some nefarious enterprise of his own. What it was, I cannot say. But as to its character there can be little doubt. George's movements," said Tony, "were those of a man whose conscience gives him no peace. He slunk. He glanced about him with furtive eyes. So startled was he by my unexpected appearance that he jumped on my neck, a thing no Trent would do in the ordinary course of events. All is not well with George. He has something on his mind."

"Let me have the letter, please," Joan said eagerly.

"Anon, anon."

Joan flushed. "You want your price?"

"That reminds me," said Tony, "of the virtuous young lady in the play, who to save her brother's fair name—but doubtless you are familiar with the pretty little tale. Such a thought," said Tony, "was far from my mind. Many as are our faults, we Waynes cannot be accused of being mercenary. Reward me or not, as you think best."

"Then why the delay?"

"Because," said Tony, "Denise and our clerical friend are over the other side of the garden, and might walk this way at any moment."

"Oh!" said Joan, glancing across the massed roses. "I didn't know that. But you might slip me the letter, anyway."

Tony complied. "I wouldn't advise you to read it here."

"Why not?"

"You might create a scene, with Dave so handy."

"Is it so bad as all that?"

"I read little," Tony confessed. "But it opened with great promise."

"I can't understand it," said Joan, almost regretfully. "He seems quite rational otherwise, doesn't he?"

"Quite."

"In fact, rather . . . nice."

"Indubitably."

"And . . . boyish."

"Extremely so."

"A little shy, even."

"That cannot be denied."

"Unaffected."

"Very."

"And so serious!"

"Uh-huh!"

"A pity he's such a prig," said Joan with a quick glance at Tony.

"A very great pity," said Tony. "A very great pity indeed. But there you are. We cannot be perfect. Some have this flaw, some have that; some this virtue, some that. None of us is perfect. You'll have noticed it."

"Do you really think he's a prig, Tony?"

Tony looked at her. Her eyes were very wistful, and her mouth drooped a little.

"As man to man?" said Tony.

"As man to man."

"He's no more a prig than I am. And," said Tony, "his bitterest enemy cannot accuse the last of the Waynes of being a prig."

"You mean that?"

"Every word."

"You're not just trying to please me?"

"Cross my heart," said Tony.

The grey eyes lightened strangely, and the sweet mouth curved in a smile. "You may kiss me now, if you want to, Tony."

"In a brotherly manner," said Tony. He took her in his arms and kissed her. The Rev. David chose that moment to appear with Denise around the corner of the bower in which they sat.

2

"That's that," Joan said, laughingly, as Tony released her. "Now please forget it."

She turned, patting her hair, and saw the Rev. David. She went pale almost as the white roses that drooped towards her from the roof of the bower. Denise flushed and bit her lip. Tony nodded to himself, watching the Rev. David.

"I beg your pardon," said the Rev. David stiffly.

"We had no idea you were here." He turned, Denise on his arm, and stalked off between the laden bushes.

"Oh, Tony!" Joan sighed. And Tony in that instant knew that never would Joan's income keep him in the luxury he desired.

"What's a kiss?" said Tony. "A sign of friendship, or a sign of love. As the first, it doesn't matter much. As the second, it matters a whole lot. Ours belonged to Class No. 1. So why worry?"

"But . . . he's such a prig," said Joan. "He mightn't understand, like you do, Tony."

"In which case," said Tony, "he's not worth worrying about." He took out a cigar, lit it, and stretched his long legs. "We would ruminate."

"You want me to go away?" said Joan.

"No," said Tony. "Not especially. But you want to go away. And a woman always does what she wants."

Joan ruffled his hair. "You're an old dear!" she said impulsively. "You understand us so well, don't you, Tony?"

"From earliest maturity," said the complacent Tony, "we have made a study of the gentle sex. Our understanding of them is unique."

"Then why don't you try to understand Denise?" Joan said, and was gone.

Tony examined the glowing end of his cigar. "Now what did she mean by that? Or did she mean anything? Or nothing? You never can tell. And

besides, she may be mistaken." He made a blue smoke-ring in the lazy air, watched it slowly vanish. "Good luck, Joan!"

Joan went hesitantly along the fragrant paths. She wanted to find the Rev. David, wanted to tell him Tony's kiss had meant nothing, wanted to tell him other things if only he'd make the telling easy for her.

And at the same time she wanted very badly to snub him for looking at her like that. She couldn't describe his look; but she knew she resented it.

She found the Rev. David moodily smoking in a far corner of the rose-garden. He was squatted on the high back of a rustic seat, his feet crooked in beneath him, studiously admiring the woods. Denise had vanished.

"Dave!" Joan said.

The Rev. David came suddenly to earth. He slipped from the back of the seat and fell on his left ear with an impact that jarred him down to his toe-nails. He sat up slowly, nursing one ankle.

"Anything wrong?" said Joan.

"I've broken my bloody ankle!" said the Rev. David.

"Heavens!" said Joan. "The man's human!"

"I . . . I beg your pardon!" said the Rev. David. "That slipped out."

"I'm glad it did," Joan said, helping him to the seat. "It was all my fault, really."

"No, no!"

"Oh, but it was."

"Not at all."

"Are we going to quarrel about it?" said Joan dangerously, unlacing his shoe. "I suppose you'll think me altogether abandoned if I take off your sock?"

The Rev. David grinned twistedly. "No; but I can manage it myself."

"I can manage it better. There!" Joan felt the injured member with slim, cool fingers. "It's not broken; only sprained. And a very slight sprain at that."

"Oh!" said the Rev. David.

"But you'd better bathe it in cold water at once, all the same."

"Not just yet," said the Rev. David.

"The longer you leave it——"

"I know all about that. Just now, I don't want to move from here."

"Why not?"

"Because you're here. And nobody else."

Joan went faintly pink. "That ankle will be very sore."

"I don't mind that," said the Rev. David. "I . . . I wonder . . . I suppose you'd think me impertinent if . . . Oh, hell! You know what I mean!"

"Your language is perfectly shocking," said Joan severely.

"But you can't imagine the relief it is. You know what I want to ask you, Joan."

"I think I do," said Joan bravely. "It's about that affair just now, isn't it? You want to know why I let Tony kiss me?"

"Yes," said the Rev. David. "I do."

"Have you any right to ask?"

"I have."

"Why?"

"Because I love you," said the Rev. David in a low voice.

Joan bent a little farther over his sprained ankle so that her face was hidden.

"Honestly, Dave?"

"Honest Injun!" He was very quiet about it.

"Then I'll tell you. I let Tony kiss me because I'd promised him a kiss as reward for something he did for me."

"Couldn't I have done it?" said the Rev. David.

"I asked you to, and you refused."

"I refused? I don't remember that."

"It happened a long time ago," said Joan. "Quite four days ago. Before we went to the island."

The Rev. David rubbed his ankle reflectively. "Still I can't remember."

"It was when I said I couldn't forgive you."

The Rev. David sat erect with a sharp yelp. "The letter!"

"The letter," said Joan.

"You asked him to get it?"

"Yes."

"And he got it?"

"Yes. That's why I let him kiss me."

"Good God!" said the Rev. David

Joan laughed softly, not very steadily. "I have it here." She took it out.

The Rev. David put a hand on her shoulder. "Joan, please!"

She looked up at him with wondering eyes. "What's the matter, Dave?"

"Don't read it."

"Why not?"

"Because if you did, you wouldn't marry me."

"You haven't asked me yet."

"I do—now," said the Rev. David. "I'm not rich—I can't offer you much. . . . But we could get a living somewhere in the country, Joan, and . . . and . . ."

"Raise chickens?" said Joan.

"I didn't mean exactly that. But . . ."

"Live happily ever after, then?"

"If you could be fond of me," said the Rev. David miserably. "But I suppose it's out of the question. You want the lights and the gaiety, and I can't offer you those."

"No," said Joan. And after that there was a long silence.

"Won't you give me some answer, Joan?" said the Rev. David at length.

Joan nodded, waved the letter before him.

"You're going to read it?" said the Rev. David quietly.

"No," said Joan, "I'm not." She tore it into two hundred and fifty-six pieces. "There's my answer, Dave."

"You mean . . ."

"I mean that I'm fed up with the lights and the gaiety, and . . . and . . . Mind that blessed ankle of yours!"

The Rev. David emitted a sharp yelp.

"I told you!" said Joan severely. "You need someone to look after you. Don't muss me all up—I want to put this hanky round it. I'll attend to you in a moment. *"That's better!* Now what have you got to say to me?"

3

Tony saw Denise walking up and down the terrace in front of the house, and went to her.

"Well, Don Juan," said Denise, "seeking further conquests?"

"Yes," said Tony.

"First turning on the right," said Denise.

Tony looked pained. The first turning on the right led to the road.

"This is not the proper spirit," said Tony. "This rancour jars upon my sensitive ear."

"In that case," said Denise, "you'd better beat it before you get earache."

"Farewell!" said Tony mournfully. "Farewell!" He strolled to the garage, took out his car, drove to the front of the house. Denise still perambulated the terrace. He rejoined her.

"Back again?" she said with a little smile. "This is your busy day, Romeo."

"We Waynes," said Tony, "have always been gay dogs. One of our ancestors was the victim of a Gretna Green marriage, so it runs in the blood."

"Poor girl!" said Denise.

"It was a man," said Tony simply. "He was sixty-one and bald; but he had the heart of a child." He measured with calculating eyes the distance that separated them from the car. "The sun shines, the birds sing, and there wants still an hour to lunch. How about a short tour of the countryside?"

"I think not," said Denise. "You're climbing up the wrong balcony, Romeo."

"That may well be," said Tony. He stooped, picked her up gently yet firmly. "In times long gone the Wayne bachelor took his woman by force. Who shall say that we have deteriorated?"

"If you don't let me down," said Denise, "I'll scream."

"Ha, ha!" said Tony. "If you scream, I'll kiss you. Threat for threat."

Denise was silent until he seated her in the car and slipped in beside her. "Where are we going?" she said then.

"This," said Tony, letting in the clutch, "might well be termed the Road to Happiness. It rests with you whether or not we reach our destination."

"Oh!" said Denise.

"Let me tell you a story," said Tony. "Once upon a time there was a Rich Young Man. Now this Rich Young man was very shy in the presence of the gentle sex, which made life a misery for him, as by reason of his great wealth he was much sought after by mammas with daughters still unwed.

"In the fullness of time he came to regard marriageable girls as his natural enemies, and to side-step their advances with a certain smooth efficiency, much as the tiger bounds from the path of the wild elephant. For he had come to look upon Love as a dream for poets, a catch-word for designing women; and any mention of it brought a cynical smile to his finely-chiselled features.

"Now this Rich Young Man, because of his lavish expenditure, one day found himself a Poor Young Man, with only a few paltry hundreds between himself and starvation. This discovery came as a shock to him; for he could neither sow nor spin, and the thought of work sent icy shivers down his spine. So he exchanged his boyish ideals for some of a more mercenary character, and looked about him for a rich girl to marry."

"I see," said Denise. "Pray continue."

"About this time," Tony continued, "the Poor

Young Man met a friend of his boyhood, who invited him to spend a week at his country seat. The Poor Young Man gladly accepted, thinking to himself that at this mob scene he might perchance discover his ideal mate, rich and beautiful to an unusual degree.

"In this he was correct, encountering three Winsome Damsels. So charming were they that he had the greatest difficulty in deciding which he wished to marry. He proposed to one, and was rejected. He proposed to the second, and was rejected. He was prevented from proposing to the third only by an unforeseen incident; but doubtless her answer would have been the same.

"Then, without warning, he found himself in love."

"How thrilling!" said Denise.

"The object of his devotion seemed unaware of this. Happening to witness an unfortunate incident, she preserved towards him an atmosphere having much in common with that of an iceberg."

"I suppose," said Denise, "he had an ingenious explanation of the unfortunate incident?"

"He had," said Tony. "The kiss he received was a kiss of gratitude for something he had done, not a kiss of love."

"What had he done?"

"He had faithfully retrieved a letter in which a gentleman of the Cloth denounced our modern stage."

"Interesting, if true," said Denise. "Let's come down to earth, Tony. Are you the hero of this tale?"

Tony nodded. "The Wayne coffers are empty," he said.

"And the object of your devotion?"

"You."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"I had hoped," said Tony, "to marry you. I know there are some whose moral code would not allow them to do this; but I am not of their number. The fact that you have money weighs with me not at all. It would be the same if you had none."

"Honestly?" said Denise.

"You have the Wayne word for it."

"Well," said Denise, "why shouldn't you be happy? I have about three pounds sterling between me and the great open spaces."

"I beg your pardon?" said Tony.

"I've never been in Chicago in my life," said Denise. "I've worked ever since I left school. Once, I was a waitress. Now, I'm a mannequin. In Trent's Mammoth Store."

"George!" said Tony.

"George," said Denise. She gripped Tony's arm. "Did you tell him you were looking for a girl to marry?"

"I did."

"And then he asked you down?"

"He did."

"That was the day you saw me in White Street?"

"It was."

"I see it all," said Denise. "He thought I meant to blackmail him, and tried to work me off on you. He knew you were looking for a rich wife, and thought I was looking for a rich hubby. And there you are."

"Quite," said Tony. "And last night he was looking for those letters when I interrupted him. However."

"He won't find them," said Denise. "Why are you pulling up?"

"To kiss you," said Tony.

"I didn't say you could, yet," said Denise.

"I can," said Tony. He did.

"You're rather a darling," said Denise. "You may do it again."

"You love me?" said Tony.

"Of course I love you. I've loved you ever since I saw you that day in White Street."

"We'll become engaged immediately," said Tony. "I'll buy you a ring as big as a knuckle-duster, and we'll get married next month."

"On what?" said Denise practically.

"I'll get a job," said Tony. "I'll even work for you."

"A job as what?"

"Search me."

"You men," said Denise, "all need someone to look after you. Now listen. I know something better than that."

4

"George!" said Denise.

It was after lunch, in the library. The Rev. David had announced his engagement to Joan, and George brooded.

"Yes?" he said absently.

"When's the wedding?"

"Dave's? Pretty soon, I imagine."

"Not Dave's. Ours."

George leaped three feet into the air. "Eh?"

"I've decided to accept you," Denise said tranquilly.

"But," said George with admirable frankness, "I don't want to marry you."

"Have you no shame?" said Tony, appearing in the door. "Leader astray of young girls, have you no shame?"

"You keep out of this," said George. "You've poked your nose too much into my business as it is."

"But," said Denise, "what about all those lovely letters you wrote me, George dear?"

George turned a sickly green. "This is blackmail," he said hoarsely.

"You've said a mouthful, brother," said Tony. "Blackmail it is."

"You . . . you . . ." hissed George.

"So's your old man," said Tony amiably. "But let's to business. Denise and I have decided that the noble name of Wayne must go down to future generations.

In short, we intend to marry. But in these days of base materialism one cannot live on love. Much less two." He raised a hand in dignified protest. "We want no money. No."

"Then what *do* you want?" said George.

"A job of work," said Tony. "A job in which I have nothing to do, and a capable staff to do it for me. At, of course, a reasonable salary."

George looked relieved. "I can do that easily enough. I'll give you charge of one of our big branches, provided you don't interfere with the business. That suit?"

"Admirably," said Tony.

"Then I'll have those letters," said George.

"Wrong again," said Denise. "We'll keep them, just in case you want to cut Tony's salary some day."

George grinned. "I suppose I'll have to trust you." He held out his hand. "We'll let bygones be bygones, eh, Tony?"

"Spoken like a man," said Tony.

"Well," said George, glancing through the window, "I'll leave you to it. Good luck, and all the rest of it." He vanished.

"What's his hurry?" said Denise. She looked out, and saw Lady Pat strolling pensively among the roses. "Infectious, isn't it?"

"Very," said Tony. "You're sure you have those letters safe?"

"Quite," said Denise easily. "I burned them weeks ago."

"Eh?" said Tony. "You burned them?"

Denise smoothed down the lapels of his jacket. "Why should I keep them? Now, if they'd been from *you*. . . . Tony, *please!* Mind my hair!"

"That's all right," said Tony briefly. "It's not a wig."

CHAPTER SEVEN

I

"THAT's that," said Tony, shaking rice out of his ear.

"Thank Heaven!" said Denise.

2

"I reserved a compartment," said Tony.

"Oh!" said Denise.

3

"Shall we have the blinds down?" said Tony.

"If you wish," said Denise.

4

"Denise . . ." said Tony.

"Tony . . ." said Denise.

THE END

**Are you
interested in news
of the
latest books ?**

If so, fill in your name and address below and post the flap to STANLEY PAUL & CO. LTD., the publishers of this book, and they will be pleased to send you from time to time their announcements of their important publications as issued.



STANLEY PAUL & CO. LTD.
Publishers

178/202 Great Portland St.
London, W.1

Name

Address

.....

NEW FICTION



M. E. ALLAN

MURDER AT THE FLOOD

JOAN BUTLER

READY CASH
BRIDAL SUITE

JOHN COURAGE

A CORPSE FOR CHARLIE
THE PARKER CASE

CLARE EMSLEY

FLAME OF YOUTH

T. C. H. JACOBS

BROKEN ALIBI

EDITH NEPEAN

GILT FROM THE CHARMER

T. ARTHUR PLUMMER

CONDEMNED TO LIVE

SHIRLEY SEIFERT

LET MY NAME STAND FAIR

NORGROVE THURLEY

GIANTS OF DARKNESS

ANNE VERNON

THE GOLD FAMILY

JEREMY YORK

SIGHT OF DEATH



STANLEY PAUL